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STORYTELLERS COMPANION™



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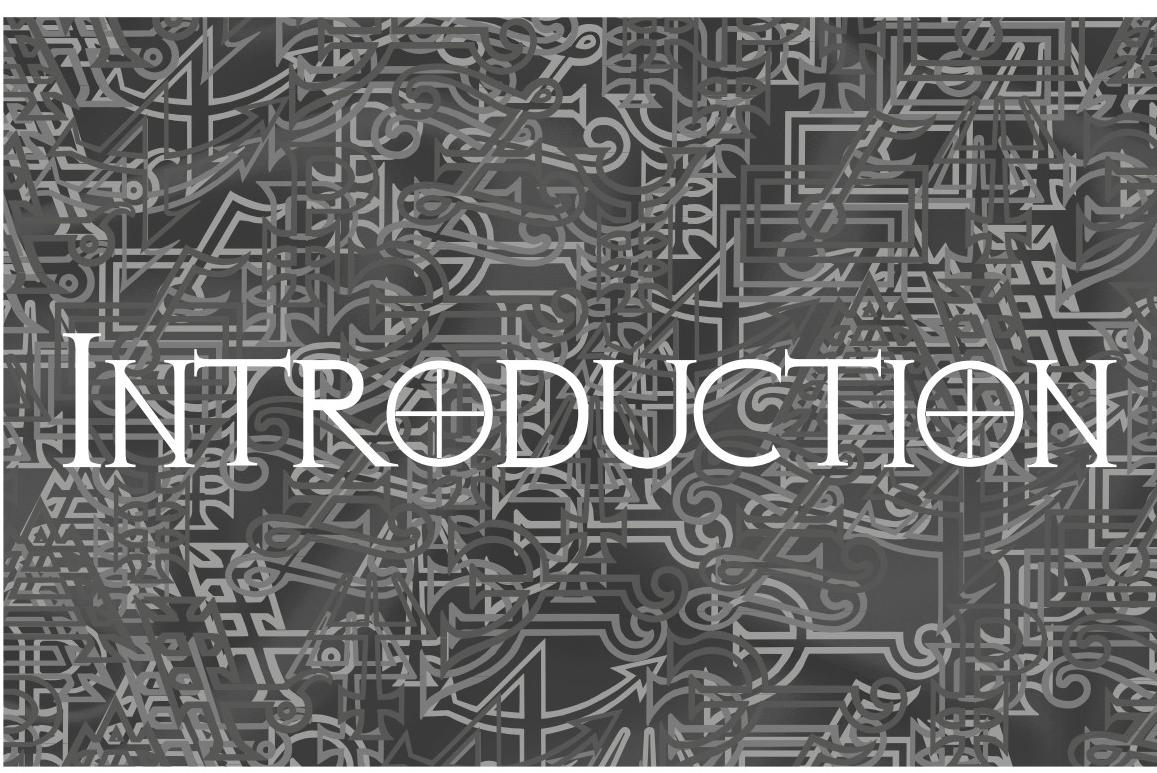
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INTRODUCTION



Hard times lie ahead for Tradition mages as the Technocracy tightens its hold on reality. As the Ascension War ends with both a bang and a whimper, the survivors seek shelter wherever they can. Cut off from most of their teachers and the secure Horizon Realms they once thought inviolate, mystic mages of all kinds seek new ways to progress in their knowledge while looking over their shoulder with well-deserved paranoia at the same time.

Just as modern war imposes its most harsh penalties on the civilian population, the Ascension War has taken an even greater toll on the independent Craft mages and members of the Disparate groups. Those who could not find safety in numbers or make common cause with former rivals have faded, like the fantastic beasts of the Mythic Ages, into obscurity or annihilation. The new millennium has arrived.

Hope does not die easily, however. Despite the Technocracy's best efforts, practitioners of mystic magic persist, although they find the road ahead of them longer, darker and more dangerous than ever before. Out of the ruins of the War for Ascension, new alliances have arisen as old grudges give way to the necessity of uniting against a greater enemy. Old dogs learn new tricks and hone their mundane and magical skills in back alleys, abandoned warehouses and isolated backwoods cabins. Scholars of history look back on the past and try to figure out just where it all went wrong, making notes for "next time."

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The material contained in these pages provides information geared primarily toward Storytellers but useful to players as well.

Of course, Storytellers may wish to choose which information they make available to their troupes.

The **Introduction** (which you are currently reading) provides an overview of this volume.

Chapter One: The Story So Far chronicles the highlights of the Ascension War from the rise of magical schools through the division between magic and science to the decisive strike used by the Technocracy in its final assault on the mages of the Traditions and Crafts. In addition, this chapter reveals little-known information about what really happened to fracture the world of true magic, and it gives some guidelines for updating your chronicle with the new information.

Chapter Two: The Disparates takes a look at the repercussions of the Ascension War with regard to the independent mages of the Crafts and the Disparate schools of magic. Histories and fates of the now-defunct Crafts as well as detailed write-ups on the few surviving Disparate groups offer ways for Storytellers and players to update characters in the wake of the Ascension War.

Chapter Three: Spirits and Bygones explains the use of various sorts of spirits in a *Mage* chronicle, and it details a few specific examples. This section also talks about the mystical beasts that once roamed the world but now thrive only in the Umbra, except for rare appearances on Earth.

Chapter Four: Wonders describes in detail the various sorts of magical items that mages might run across. Here, too, you'll find complete rules for building new Wonders, using Periaps and Relics, and even binding familiars.

As usual, feel free to pick and choose from the information provided here. Keep what strikes your fancy, and ignore the rest. To the victors belong the spoils.



CHAPTER ONE: THE STORY SO FAR

TIME-LINE OF THE ASCENSION WAR



War makes history, just as history makes wars. Conflicts mark the procession of human history from its earliest ages. The same holds true for the history of magic. The Ascension War has its unofficial beginnings in the earliest explorations of the principles of interpreting and shaping reality.

And yet, not all wars take place on the battlefield. Philosophical and ideological struggles occupy the interim periods historians refer to as “peacetime.” Although these battles for power seldom involve actual casualties, they lay the groundwork for many of the bloody encounters that come later.

The following time-line traces the evolution of magical thinking and the development of the various paradigms that have resulted in the clash of wills between the mystic Traditions and the Technocratic Conventions. **Mage: The Sorcerer's Crusade** and **Horizon: The Stronghold of Hope** provide other sources for cataloging the historical progression of the Ascension War.

IN THE BEGINNING: FROM THE LEGENDARY AGE TO THE CHRISTIAN ERA THE ORIGINS OF MAGIC

Prehistory: Tribal shamans, mystics and healers discover the hidden precepts of magic, identifying natural and supernatural sources of power within and outside the borders of perception. Magic, religion and “science” coexist as the basis of creativity and progress.

4000-2800 BCE: Thanatoic and Ecstatic cults arise in India. The Akashic Brotherhood takes form in China and Tibet. Babylonian priest-scientists uncover the principles of geometry and astrology, harnessing the power of mathematics and the heavens to the human will. Druidic priests and practitioners of natural magic raise Stonehenge in accordance with the movements of the celestial bodies.

2800-1100 BCE: Followers of science and magic explore the intricacies of their respective paths. In Egypt, Imhotep — called the “first true scientist” — rises to prominence.

Daedalus the Great achieves legendary status as an innovator and artisan of magic. The Golden Age of Greek Magic encompasses the mystic exploits of sorcerers and magicians such as Orpheus and Medea. Moses and his magician brother Aaron lead the Israelites out of Egypt, working miracles of faith along the way.

965-300 BCE: Solomon the Wise builds a temple according to Hermetic principles and establishes early tenets of ritual magic. In response to the 10,000-Djinni Plague, Solomon and other Arabic sorcerers succeed in binding or banishing a host of malevolent spirits and demons. The Himalayan Wars range for 600 years, driving a rift between Akashics and Hindu magi. The struggle results in the voluntary withdrawal of the Akashics into seclusion.

580- 200 BCE: The Golden Age of Greek Science ushers in a wellspring of discovery and invention for early science mages and builds a firm structure for what later becomes known as the “Western paradigm” of belief. Plato, Pythagoras, Hippocrates, Archimedes and Aristotle stand among the guiding luminaries of this period.

560-200 BCE: In the lands of the East, the Golden Age of Chinese Science features the teachings and discoveries of Kung Fu-tse, Lu Pan and other masters of philosophy and wisdom. The Chinese paradigm arises, with its structure based on the cosmic order. At the same time, Cults

of Hermes flourish in Greece, Italy and Egypt. Divisions between Acousmatic and Mathematic sects culminate in the War of Hermes.

THE EARLY SKIRISHES

500 BCE: The Night of Fana unites a disparate group of Akashics and Ecstatics into a new group of magi known as the Ahl-i-Batin.

496-480 BCE: The Dragon River War pits Akashics against the Five-Ghost Emperor. The resulting devastation from the magical battles results in a decade of famine and drought and brings the Dalou’laoshi artisan-mages (who would later lay the groundwork for the Five Metal Dragons) into the conflict.

400-100 BCE: Conflicts among Mathematics, Daedaleans and Acousmatics come to a head during the War of Hermes. While some groups go underground and others splinter off, the Cults of Mercury manage to survive intact. In the Eastern lands, the Wu Lung (or Dragon Wizards) draw the ire of the Akashics for their persecution of peasant mages. The Silk Accord (190-170 BCE) brings together Daedaleans and Dalou’laoshi in a pact based on the exchange of knowledge and trade. The Burning Tiger War (160-100 BCE) erupts in a three-way battle involving the Akashics, the Wu Lung and the Dalou’laoshi. Akashics defeat and



banish the Devil Wizard Tau-tse and his demon army, but not before the infernal hordes claim the lives of many mages on all sides of the conflict.

150 BCE: Greek philosopher-scientists come together to form the Mt. Ossa Calyx in an effort to preserve the knowledge of the Classical Age.

54-40 BCE: The Roman invasion of Britain results in the destruction of many Celtic sorcerers and druids by Caesar's legions. The assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE provides the impetus for Lucius Casioli's transformation of Mt. Ossa Calyx into the *Collegium Praecepti* (the Brotherhood of the Rule).

THE ASCENDANCY OF MAGIC: FROM THE CHRISTIAN ERA TO THE FIRST MILLENNIUM

DIVERSIONS FROM ASCENSION'S PATHS

4 BCE-AD 30: The life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth form the basis for the Christian religion.

10 BCE-AD 400: The codification of the Hermetic Arts results in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus. Over the centuries, the pagan influences decrease and Hermetic practitioners lean toward Christianity. Messianic Voices forms a faction within the Hermetics that espouses the teachings of Christ. In Britain, a rebellion of Celtic sorcerers and druids attempts to drive the Romans from the land. Queen Boadicea dies in the attempt to repel the Roman invaders.

AD 64: The Great Fire of Rome results in the destruction of the Hermetic Library and causes a schism between Christian and pagan factions. The Messianic Voices faction becomes the object of a purge within the Hermetic organization.

AD 121: Sparked by Roman sorcerer Marcus Fulgorator, the Lightning Scourge drives Celtic magi and druids out of southern Britain and into Scotland. Hadrian's Wall marks the division between Roman and English lands.

AD 100-756: The Devil-King Age marks a succession of demon-influenced sorcerer-sultans throughout the Middle East. The armies of the Prophet (Mohammed) and allied magi finally destroy Al-Malek Al-Majun Ibn Iblis, the last of the Devil Kings, ending the reign of terror.

AD 235: Trade disputes sever the alliance between the Dalou'laoshi and the *Collegium Praecepti*, ending the Silk Accord.

AD 300-1300: The Golden Age of pagan magic holds sway throughout most of Europe. It wanes gradually as Christian missionaries spread their faith and win converts among early European rulers.

AD 313: Emperor Constantine adopts Christianity and imposes that faith throughout the Holy Roman Empire. Clashes between newly revived Messianic Voices and Mithraic Hermetics in Rome result in riots and civil disturbances.

AD 320: The Cabal of Pure Thought arises as a result of the *Revelation of the Pure Thought of God, as Revealed by the Archangel Gabriel, His Messenger*, espousing the doctrine of one-world, one-God. This document launches the beginning of the Gabrielite movement.

AD 389: The destruction of the Great Library of Alexandria results in the loss of many Hermetic and other magical documents.

AD 410: The sack of Rome destroys the center of European Hermetic and Christian magic. Survivors disperse, spreading their particular philosophies throughout Europe. Many Hermetics flee to Byzantium. The Dark Ages begin.

AD 537: The fall of Avalon signals the end of Merlin's career.

THE SEEDS OF CONFLICT

AD 590-650: Akashic monasteries, including the illustrious Shaolin temple, come under attack by the Chinese Imperial Court.

AD 630-1100: The founding of the Islamic religion by the prophet Mohammed ignites the Golden Age of Islam, a period marked by the cooperation of science and faith throughout the Middle East. During this period, several Artisan guilds reestablish *Ars Praeclarus* under the aegis of Byzantium's enlightened atmosphere.

AD 650: Hazan I-Sabbah brings together Persian High Magicians who call themselves the Taftâni, or Weavers. This group of mages seeks to preserve the old ways of magic, opposing the ascendancy of Muslim zealots.

AD 700: The Christian Church, centered in Rome, consolidates its power and spreads throughout Europe, uniting Gabrielites, Messianic Voices and other sects under the banner of one God.

AD 767: Twelve Hermetic magicians come together to institute the *Pax Hermetica*, thus becoming the founders of the original Houses of the Order of Hermes.

AD 800: A group of warrior mystics united by their Christian faith form the Palatine Knights. These knights serve Charlemagne and become the basis for later militant mages of faith such as the Templars, Hospitalers and some factions of the Celestial Chorus.

AD 876: The Order of Hermes seizes Doissetep Covenant from the Infernalists and moves the Chantry to the Pyrenees.

AD 997: Craftmasons establish themselves as a distinct group in Frankfurt.



CLASH OF WILLS: FROM THE FIRST MILLENNIUM TO THE RENAISSANCE

RUMORS OF WAR

AD 1003-1022: Internal divisions surface within the Order of Hermes, beginning with the extermination of House Diedne — the refuge of Druidic mages — and culminating with House Tremere’s gradual transformation into a clan of vampires.

AD 1067: Founding of Mistridge.

AD 1100-1300: The Crusades sweep through Europe and across the Middle East. Holy wars between Christian knights and Muslim armies mirror the conflicts between Gabrielites (and their allies) and non-Christian practitioners of magic. The formation of the Knights Templar and other organizations of warrior-priests provides the Cabal of Pure Thought with a ready-made army of enforcers and promulgators.

AD 1171: Basing his precepts on the 1160 rediscovery of the Arabic manuscript *Kitab al Alacir*, Lorenzo Golo lays the foundation for the Hermetic House Golo (later known as the Sons of Ether).

AD 1188-1193: Lorenzo Golo leaves the Order of Hermes to join with Gabrielite Simon de Laurent, forming the Natural Philosopher’s Guild. Fragmentation within the Guild disperses its members to various artisan guilds.

AD 1201-1325: The discovery of vampiric infestation within House Tremere leads to the Massasa War and the banishment of House Tremere from the Order of Hermes. Neither side feels ready for a protracted war with the other — a move that will haunt them in later days.

THE BATTLE JOINS

AD 1210: The Craftmason Covenant brings together numerous trade and artisan guilds with the Craftmasons in southern France as a means of uniting against the Order of Hermes. Their successful attack on Mistridge signals the official beginning of the Ascension War.

AD 1210-1266: The Huns sweep across Asia and Europe. Clashes between Mongol shamans and their Eastern counterparts result in the decimation of Akashics, Taftâni and other groups. The discovery of rockets by the Dalou’laoshi guilds provides an effective weapon against the Mongols.

AD 1231: The rise of the Inquisition, supported by Gabrielites and Messianic Voices, launches witch-hunts throughout Europe.

AD 1250: The Golden Guild alliance increases the ranks of the Craftmasons.

AD 1265: The Mercy Schism divides the Inquisition, resulting in the excommunication of the Messianic Voices.

AD 1268: The London Accord, sponsored by the great artisan Roger Bacon, ends the war among the artisan guilds of England.

AD 1300: The Celestial Masters forms under the leadership of Antonio Vello and Contessa Mariana Sabine.

AD 1313: The betrayal of the Templars sends survivors underground. Some flee into the ranks of the Cabal of Pure Thought or the Celestial Chorus, depending on their personal philosophies.

AD 1315: Le Duc Luis Tristan de Varre forms the Solificati.

AD 1325: The Convention of the White Tower formalizes the Order of Reason, consolidating the Gabrielites, Cosian Circle, Void Seekers, Celestial Masters, Craftmasons, Artificers and Solificati under one banner.

AD 1330: The Paris University Purge results in the deaths of many mages and culminates in the destruction of the Hermetic Le Ictus Covenant.

AD 1330-1420: A century of plagues decimates Europe and foments persecutions of mages, witches, heretics, vampires and any other groups thought responsible for the disease.

AD 1335: The Solificati leave the Order of Reason.

AD 1345-1350: The War of the Dust Witch in the region around Great Zimbabwe results in the formation of the Ngoma and the Madzimbabwe as distinct groups of magi.

AD 1356-1360: The Screaming Ghost Purge pits Dalou'laoshi and Wu Lung mages against the Akashics, forcing an Akashic retreat to the mountains of Tibet.

AD 1420: The Year of the Great Sickness brings plague to Great Zimbabwe and sparks a war between the Ngoma and the Madzimbabwe, who blame each other for the cause of the sickness.

MAGIC DESCENDING: FROM THE RENAISSANCE TO THE 20TH CENTURY

THE ADVANCE OF SCIENCE

AD 431: Martyrdom of Joan of Arc splits the Gabrielites and drives Joan's supporter Gilles de Rais into the ranks of the Infernalists.

AD 1435-1442: General Wyngarde of the True Cross leads a massive witch-hunt through Great Britain, slaying many pagan mages and their fae allies. Nightshade, the only survivor of the Midsummer Night's massacre at Harrogate, assassinates Wyngarde, ending his campaign of slaughter.

AD 1440: The Gabrielites destroy the pagan stronghold of Baerwald, sparking open warfare between pagans and Christian mages throughout the Black Forest region. The First Mistrigue Convocation leads to the decision by mages Nightshade, Valoran, Sh'zar and Baldric La Salle to form a council



of all the Traditions. The four begin traveling throughout the world, seeking to bring as many representatives of differing magical styles to the meeting as they can.

AD 1445: The Solificati re-form under sponsorship by the Hermetic mages.

AD 1448: Siege of Doissetep by Daedalean forces from the White Tower results in the fall of the physical fortress and the relocation of the main keep to the Horizon Realm.

AD 1449: Second Mistridge Convocation draws fire from Craftmasons and Artificers. Losses are heavy, but mystic mages prevail over the forces of science and reason. Afterward, participants in the gathering assist in constructing Horizon as a place of safety in the Otherworld.

AD 1450-1453: Tezghul the Insane and his army of Lithuanian demon-worshippers scours the Baltic, operating from his base in Kupala Alka.

AD 1452: Daedalean forces swear an Oath of Fire against vampires, magi and other opponents. Major hunts take shape across Europe and the known world. War breaks out in France the following year between the Gabrielites on one side and the Hermetics and pagans on the other.

AD 1453: Copernicus demonstrates the validity of his theory that the earth and the other planets revolve around the sun, thus demolishing the heliocentric conception of the universe and undermining one of the prime tenets of religious faith. Whether his theory actually changed the universe or simply observed it remains a hotly debated axis of metaphysic study.

AD 1455: In Vienna, Hermetics and Kabbalists battle Cosian and High Guild forces. The war spreads to engulf the Artificers and Gabrielites. Four magical strongholds — two in Europe and two in Persia — come under assault. Artaxerxes' Court in Persia falls, but Lyonsse, Stonehenge and the Canyon of Qu-Dali survive.

AD 1457-1466: The Grand Convocation of Traditions attempts to unite mystic factions from around the world. From this meeting, the Nine Traditions take form, assimilating some groups, such as the Madzimbabwe, into existing Traditions. Others, including the Taftâni and the Ngoma, refuse membership, forming the core of the groups known hereafter as the Disparate. The passage of the *Resolutions & Protocols of the Nine Mystic Traditions* serves as the official basis for the Council of Nine, which consists of the Akashic Brotherhood, Ahl-i-Batin, Chakravanti (Euthanatos), Celestial Chorus, Dreamspeakers, Order of Hermes, Seers of Chronos (Cult of Ecstasy), Solificati and Verbena.

AD 1466-1470: The First Cabal, consisting of one member from each of the Nine Traditions, makes its way across the world in an attempt to gain support for the new Council and strengthen the faltering forces of mystic-based magic. Their journey ends in betrayal by one of their own, Heyel Teomim of the Solificati. The Council captures the

traitor and holds a trial which results in a sentence of Gilgul. The Solificati break with the Traditions.

AD 1471: The Solificati fragment after the execution of their leader, leaving a vacant seat on the Council. Remnants of the former Tradition find refuge either with the Order of Hermes, the Order of Reason or flee into hiding.

AD 1472: The Battle of Harz marks the defeat of Tezghul and his armies by Cosian and Artificer forces.

AD 1475: The War of Concordia takes place when White Tower forces storm the portals of Horizon. Their failure to take the Council city of Concordia halts their effort, and they retreat after a concerted campaign of destruction that ultimately weakens the Traditions.

AD 1480-1540: The career of Dr. George (Johannes) Faustus provides a legendary example of infamy for all who practice the magical arts.

AD 1486: The publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* results in the official declaration of war between the forces of faith, science and reason (the White Tower and its allies in the Church) and the mystic traditions.

AD 1500: The 12 remaining Solificati rename their tradition the Children of Knowledge but elect to remain outside the Council.

THE RETREAT OF MAGIC

AD 1525: The Battle of Pavia ignites conflicts between French and Spanish mages in Horizon Realm, creating turmoil within the Traditions.

AD 1535: An attack by a group of Artificers on Horizon leads to their capture and coerced assimilation into the Order of Hermes.

AD 1542: Order of Reason uses the proliferation of mechanical clocks to solidify time according to their conception of reality, thus striking a blow against the Seers of Chronos.

AD 1563: With the complicity of Hermetics in sympathy with the Artificers, the Order of Reason infiltrates universities in Europe, spreading its version of truth to university students. This practice continues to the present day.

AD 1625-1654: A Peace Tribunal held in Horizon attempts to quell the disputes and outright wars that have plagued the Traditions since the formation of the Council of Nine. Although the mages of Doissetep fail to attend, most Tradition mages consider the attempt at least partially successful.

AD 1655: Doissetep captures the Dome of the Golden Eye Construct, achieving a major victory over the Technocratic Union.

AD 1736: Growing resentment against the Janissaries forces their ousting as guardians of Horizon.

AD 1750: Tradition mages hold a Tribunal of Recruitment in order to boost their failing membership.

AD 1756: More than 100 Native American Dream-speakers withdraw from Horizon due to bias against “tribal” and shamanic mages.

AD 1825: Traditions experience a growth spurt. Seers of Chronos rename themselves the Sahajiya. Later they again change their name to the Cultists of Bacchus and, finally, the Cult of Ecstasy.

AD 1834: Charles Babbage’s invention of an “analytical engine” (also called a “difference engine”), combined with Lady Ada Lovelace’s theories on computational processes, establishes the principles of the modern computer and spawns a new group of Technocratic mages calling themselves the Difference Engineers.

AD 1850-1900: Growing interests in the occult and spiritualism, coinciding with the rise of the Theosophist movement in Europe and the United States, results in a weakening of the scientific paradigm and leads to an increase in the number of Tradition mages.

AD 1865: Gregor Mendel’s discovery of genetic inheritance gives impetus to the Cosians’ experiments on designing new and better humans.

AD 1866: Members of the Natural Philosophers Guild change their name to the Electrodyne Engineers in homage to the new scientific discoveries of the age.

AD 1872: Tradition mages open a dialogue with the Electrodyne Engineers, Technocratic mages who seem on the verge of defection.

AD 1880: In response to the implications of the work of Alexander Graham Bell and other early experimenters in communications technology, the Difference Engineers discover the paradigm of “virtual reality” and change their name to Virtual Adepts.

MAGIC'S DEFEAT: THE MODERN ERA

THE ASCENSION WAR ESCALATES

AD 1900: Former Craftmasons and members of the High Guild unite to form the Syndicate.

AD 1904: Technocratic advances in the Middle East and the Technocratic monopoly on Quintessence in that region deal severe damage to the Ahl-i-Batin, causing their number to diminish significantly.

AD 1905: The Sons of Ether leave the Technocratic Union and seek membership in the Council of Nine, filling the seat left vacant with the withdrawal of the Solificati.

AD 1914-1918: The Great War involves the major world powers in a monumental and devastating conflict that provides many Technocratic mages with a testing ground for their new developments in mechanical and chemical warfare.



AD 1914: Lord Vargo, a delusional Son of Ether, attempts to use his fleet of airships to seize world power. His prevention by the Operative Methodology, a group of Technocratic mages at the beginning of the Great War, leads to the eventual formation of the New World Order.

AD 1932: The Ahl-i-Batin withdraw from the Council of Nine in protest against exploitation of the Middle East by Tradition-backed forces (not to mention Technocratic intervention in the region).

AD 1939-1945: World War II divides the Traditions as individual mages find themselves entangled in nationalistic loyalties and political turmoil. A temporary alliance with the Technocracy defeats Nephantic influence, but cooperation falters after the war's end. The Sons of Ether play a role in bringing fractured Traditions back into harmony with one another in 1946.

AD 1945: The detonation of two atomic bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki demonstrate the utter destruction made possible through purely "scientific" means.

AD 1947: An alien spacecraft crashes in the desert near Roswell, New Mexico. Pervasive cover-ups by Void Engineers and the New World Order keep the truth from the general public, but rumors of "little green men" spark a UFO craze that persists throughout the remainder of the century.

AD 1958?: By the end of the 1950's, the Clockwork Convention becomes known as Iteration X, achieving the theoretical perfection of unity between human and machine.

PEACE AT LAST

AD 1961: The Virtual Adepts leave the Technocracy and join the Traditions, bringing the number of seats on the Council once again to nine.

AD 1969: The Woodstock Festival unites a generation of young Sleepers in the belief that enlightenment and peace

can come about through music, drugs, tribal values and "good vibrations." Younger members of the Cult of Ecstasy, Celestial Chorus, Dreamspeakers and other Traditions consider this festival a watermark in the Ascension War, boosting the general population's collective consciousness closer to mass Awakening. Just as this event bolsters the spirits of the Traditions, the successful mission to place astronauts on the moon gives the Technocracy (and the Void Engineers, in particular) a tremendous victory, proving the truth of their definition of reality. Ironically, the awe and wonder caused by the spectacle of the moonwalk also increases the Sleepers' willingness to believe in the possibility of the heretofore impossible.

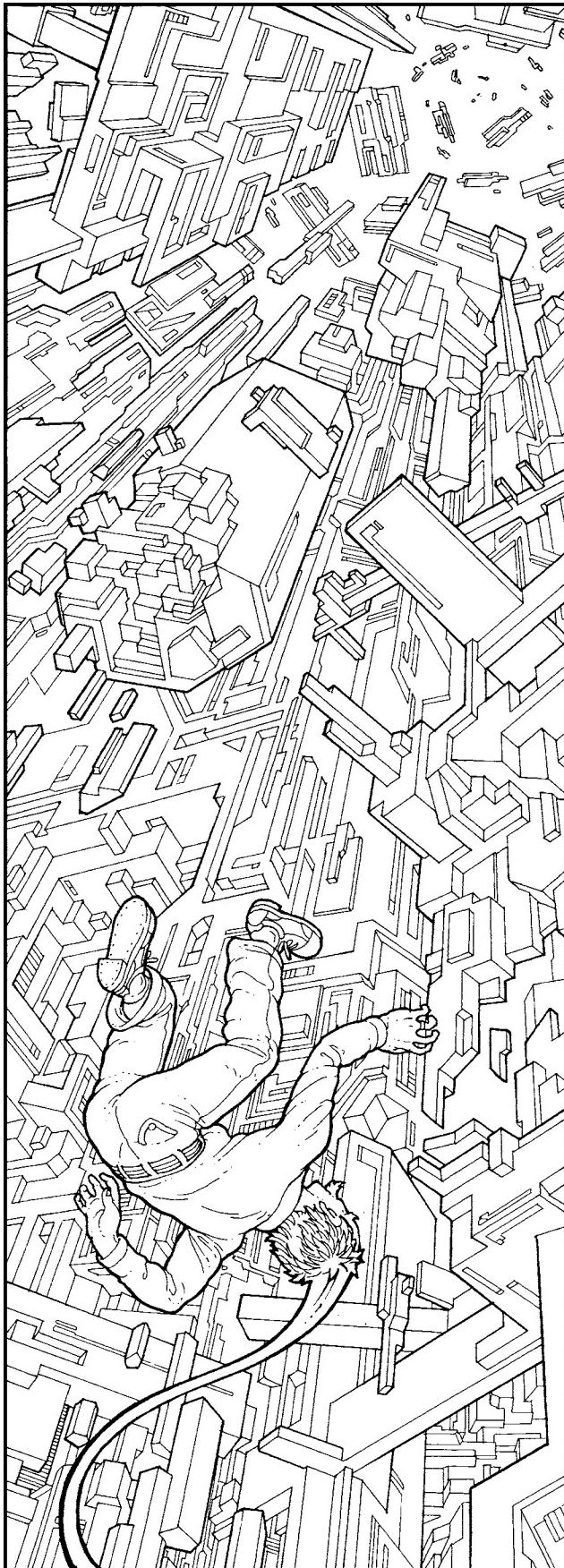
AD 1970: The Hollow Ones petition the Council for Tradition membership, but they receive a firm rejection.

AD 1981: The appearance of the IBM personal computer in the public marketplace opens up access to the virtual world to the masses. Technocratic mages and Virtual Adepts alike claim this advance as a victory.

AD 1995: A 10th region forms in Horizon when the Great Rift opens on the continent of Posht, between territories assigned to the Sons of Ether and the Virtual Adepts.

AD 1998: A terrible "War in Heaven" culminates in the destruction of Concordia and the death of many Tradition Archmages, including the famous Porthos Fitz-Empress of the Order of Hermes. Tradition leadership staggers as most of their potent mages and council members are killed.

AD 1999: In a grand display of power, the Technocrats detonate a "spirit nuke" in the Underworld, with repercussions that result in the deaths of many supernatural creatures, mages unlucky enough to be in the cosmic "blast radius," and over a million luckless Sleepers. This event serves notice to the Traditions that time has run out for them. The Ascension War was out of their hands — except insofar as they could survive its aftermath.



BACKSTORY: THE FUTURE RESTS UPON THE PAST



Although Storytellers should know at least the basics of what's going on behind the scenes, players should wait for a story line that allows them to discover some of these ongoing events. If you plan to play in a *Mage* chronicle, we suggest you skip this portion of the text so it won't ruin any surprises your Storyteller has in store.

THE NUKES

In 1999 the Technocracy used neutron missiles and orbiting mirrors to reduce the Ravnos Antediluvian vampire (the oldest of its bloodline) to dust. That much may be either rumor or common knowledge among some Tradition mages at this point. What is not well known is that the Technocrats also detonated a spirit nuke in the Labyrinth at the same time, and a relic nuke from Stygia destroyed Enoch. So much spirit energy released in such violent fashion has had terrible consequences. Wraiths are assailed by the Sixth Maelstrom (the fury of which is unprecedented), and the Gauntlet takes on such a fiery new character that magic becomes inordinately difficult.

THE AVATAR-STORM

An unexpected effect of the tremendous outpouring of spirit power, the Avatar-storm is born when humans and mages alike have their semi-corporeal spirit Avatars shredded by the power of the Maelstrom and spirit winds. Caught up in this sudden spirit gale, even the most potent mages are left with little time to escape. Many powerful mages flee beyond Earth, seeking shelter in Horizon Realms. A few try to immure themselves in their Sanctums.

Others are not so fortunate. Surprised by the howling destruction, some mages suffer Gilgul. Others experience the devastation of having their Avatars flayed, shredded and turned into spirit-debris as the pieces are caught up and flung wildly about by the Maelstrom winds. Thus, a flying wall of razor-sharp Avatar shards creates an almost impenetrable barrier, reinforcing the Gauntlet and making magic quite difficult to enact in the modern age.

THE BARRING OF THE MASTERS

Those who made the escape across the Gauntlet and fled Earth now find it impossible to return across that same barrier. They dare not brave the Avatar-storm lest their own



Avatars be destroyed in the crossing, nor can they return to Earth without facing the probability that their own power might shred them in those same winds and scatter them across the Gauntlet. Spirit travel has become highly dangerous as well. Thus, the Masters — the greatest practitioners of magic among the Traditions — have been separated from their fellows. They must remain in enforced exile or risk losing everything they are for all eternity.

TECHNOCRACY ASCENDANT

Lacking most of their heavy-hitters, the Traditions are hard-pressed to continue at all, much less to take the battle to the Technocrats. Many Council members are dead. Cut off from Earth, the surviving Masters have given up the attempt to return for now, acknowledging that the Technocracy has won the formal Ascension War. Instead, they have fled to their own spirit Realms to fortify them as permanent shelters.

Tradition members who remain behind find themselves increasingly isolated. They realize they have no chance of unseating the Technocrats, so they rely instead on concealing their powers, disappearing into the background among the Sleepers and working more subtly to change peoples' attitudes. Their only hope is to eventually change the way

people think enough to allow them to change the paradigm on an individual level. For now, though, they still remain more organized than the surviving Crafts. The Traditions counsel their members to keep their heads down and get by as best they can on their own.

THE FRACTURED CRAFTS

If the Traditions find things tough, the Crafts have been devastated. Although few Crafts could boast Masters powerful enough to become losses in the Avatar-winds, they too have found magic difficult to practice. Further, they have become the targets of a deliberate campaign to wipe them out. Noting the success of such earlier campaigns of assimilation and annihilation as the "Indian Schools" of the old West (which destroyed Native American children's ties to their tribes, beliefs and languages), Choe Yo'ng of the Syndicate is "modernizing" education. By controlling what and how indigenous populations learn and linking such knowledge to their future prosperity, Yo'ng undermines the cultural beliefs that serve as the basis for most Craft mages. In this way, the Crafts find it increasingly difficult to gain new recruits. Combined with conventional strikes against individual Crafts, Yo'ng's campaign has taken a deadly toll on the Disparates.

Lacking either the resources or the unity to fight Yo'ng's subtle manipulations effectively, the Crafts have slowly gone under. One by one, they've either joined with a Tradition that espouses similar views on magic, become Orphans as their groups withered away, become true independents working individually or died. In short, the Disparates no longer exist in any large numbers.

PUTTING IT TO WORK

The World of Darkness is not a static place and neither should your game be. You can use the information given here regardless of the time frame in which you place your game. If you play in something other than the modern era, you might use the timeline and this section as a future toward which your game moves. You might even let hints of "future" events trickle down to the players in the form of visions or weird side effects of the Time Sphere. Should your troupe like building its own chronicles independent of the accepted story line, it's easy to take the events as what could happen if the characters don't stop it from occurring.

If, however, you plan to play within the given parameters, your job is to make what is happening of immediate concern to the players' characters. If they are portraying newly created characters, you might run a chronicle based on linking them up with those who can teach them or initiate them into a Tradition. Conversely, should your players want Technocracy mages, they will find plenty of opportunities for learning, but they might be required to help carry out assignments against those dangerous individuals who still profess independence. Then again, they might be Technocrats who understand that "science" is *becoming* magic as scientists discover more weird anomalies every day. They might rebel against the hierarchical structures holding them back or see the value in some of the Traditions' beliefs and attempt to sabotage some of the Technocracy's workings.

They might even seek to tweak the current paradigm to their own design.

Similar stories could involve veteran characters. Although *Mage* is refocusing attention on the Earth and the actions of those on this planet, you could run a chronicle built around getting back to Earth and weakening the Gauntlet. Perhaps the players wouldn't know if their characters could survive such a journey until they try it.

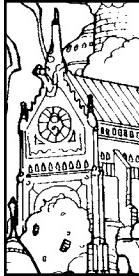
In ongoing stories, the detonation of the nukes, the strengthening of the Gauntlet and the barring of the Masters all should have an untold effect on what the characters do in the future. Considering the deadly spirit-winds that have the potential to turn your Avatar into so much Gauntlet trash, it's time to learn real subtlety. Then again, the Traditions are in disarray and new blood is needed to reconstitute the Council. It might be just the time for moderately powerful characters to step forward and grasp the reins of leadership.

These changing times bring up another difficulty for the characters. As they discover more and draw closer to total understanding, they become more closely in sync with their Avatars. When this happens, Arete increases. If their Arete becomes too powerful, they might be in danger of destruction from the Avatar-storm that continues to swirl throughout the Gauntlet and that reaches out to suck in those whose power it detects. How do the characters grow and become more knowledgeable without being destroyed? Can they reach a balance point? That single question might occupy them as a life-long quest woven in and around everything else they do.

Finally, if any characters have been members of a Craft, they have some hard decisions ahead. Will they join a Tradition? Turn Orphan? Go into hiding or opt for total independence? What will their decisions mean in terms of learning more? Will they disappear quietly and work to undermine the Technocracy's stranglehold, or will they self-destruct in a glorious final strike against their enemies?



CHAPTER TWO: THE DISPARATES



At one time, there were no formal groups of mages, just Awakened people who practiced that personal view of magic — usually to benefit their tribes or selves. Over time, these people exchanged ideas and formed groups of like-minded practitioners. Heeding the call, some of these groups came together to form the Council and became known as the Traditions. Some chose the road of technology and became

Technocrats. Those who chose not to involve themselves in the Ascension War were those whose styles and magic were so culturally based that they had no stake in the conflict. These groups became the Crafts, also known as the Disparates. In the minds of many Tradition mages, Craft mages were considered to be little more than hedge mages. They were lowly, ill-informed and unwilling to shoulder their part of the battle for Ascension. To their own minds, the Crafts were concerned with local affairs, or they practiced magic in ways the others found alien. They saw no need to join with those with whom they had so little in common. They just wanted to be left alone to practice magic in the time-honored fashion of their ancestors and forebears. They didn't ask for help from the Traditions, and none was forthcoming.

Now, all that has changed. Decimated by strikes from the Technocracy, reeling from the undermining of their way of life and too disorganized to fight back effectively, the

Crafts now find themselves dying out or forced to join with the Traditions simply to survive. It is a bitter realization to know that their own vision has failed and to wonder if they can impart some of what they believe to those whom they once refused to join. And they also wonder — how long until the Traditions too are destroyed?

GONE, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The groups detailed here were once some of the strongest Crafts known. In the long years of their existence, they have fallen through the cracks, taking no side of the Ascension War. They would claim that they had no interest in that war; sadly, they were wrong. While the groups wished to be left to practice as they would, both Tradition and Technocracy have helped to undermine them. Often, well-meaning Tradition mages tried to co-opt them or replace them "for their own good." Sometimes, as with the Celestial Chorus meeting with the Bata'a, the outlooks were simply too far apart to allow friendly interaction. For a long time, the Technocracy either overlooked them or studied them with a view to a future policy. Now, the Technocrats have decided to annihilate these dangerous offshoots and the cultures that formed them. In these harsh times, the Crafts are hunted to extinction, forced to assimilate into a Tradition that recognizes some similarities or determined to fight to the death. It isn't an easy time to be a Craft mage, but then again, it never was.

BATA'A: THE SPIRITS' BODIES



Born of the fusion of traditional African magic, ancestor-worship, ghost lore, the Caribbean natives' spirit-bonding and Spanish Catholicism, Bata'a became the magical society of the natives and the slaves brought to the Caribbean Islands some 200 years ago. Named for the sacred drums that awaken the spirits, Bata'a encompasses mystics from a number of religions—Voudoun, Santeria, Candomble and Catholic, to name a few. The Bata'a have a goal to bring freedom and prosperity to the people of their region (regardless of where they live or what religion they follow) and to reunite them with the spirits of their land. Although they have achieved much success in parts of their goal, the region remains impoverished and subject to environmental disasters that suck the life from both the people and the land. And even freedom has not turned out to be what was promised.

Passionate, energetic, frightening and mysterious, the society has always aroused both awe and fear in outsiders. The Bata'a can be kindly and helpful or brutal and terrible, often depending on which spirit they serve or have called. The wise walk softly around these folk and speak no ill of them, for their curses can be lethal. Their enmity to those who cause harm to them or those they call their own is legendary. Bata'a is not merely a magical practice to them, but their way of life. While they may wrap themselves in show intended to scare the half-skeptical half-sneering tourists, the magic they do is deadly serious and quite dangerous for all involved.

One branch of the islands' natives, known as the Qua'ra, already practiced an Art called *quinshi* when European explorers came to the islands. *Quinshi* called for its practitioners to surrender themselves to spirits and ghosts, who possessed them. Often, the hosts died as the spirits indulged dark appetites or committed terrible deeds while in possession. Nonetheless, the spirits rewarded those who gave of themselves, granting them favors such as warnings of disaster or bountiful crops.

Pirates and claimants came in the wake of the explorers, with Spain and France occupying and settling the islands. They soon enslaved many of the natives, including the Qua'ra, all of whom were weakened by the strange European diseases the invaders brought with them. To replace native slaves who died, the settlers brought in African slaves, and these slaves brought their beliefs with them and joined with the Qua'ra. Trying to save souls as their secular counterparts enriched themselves, missionaries baptized natives and Africans alike, claiming them for Catholicism. Little did they understand that these two groups took only some of the symbols and names of the religion, pasting it atop their own beliefs and calling on the new Christian spirits in the

same way they had summoned ancestor ghosts and spirits of the land for generations.

But the magical nature of the land disoriented and made the Europeans afraid. They feared the Qua'ra, eventually banning *quinshi* and burning its practitioners as black wizards. The land's spirits seethed with anger, and chaos burst forth. Terrible storms echoed Maelstroms across the Gauntlet, and the land's bounty turned to dust. In the midst of the chaos, while the old guardians were weak, the Setite vampires staked a claim to the region and have befouled it ever since.

Still, before the Qua'ra perished, they imparted their knowledge to the African slaves whose beliefs mirrored their own. Old spirits of the land became the new loa and orisha of the new religions such as Voudoun. The landholders, still fearful, tried to ban the religions and execute their priests and priestesses, yet Bata'a persisted. Fueled by runaway slaves, the desire to punish cruel masters and the tortures inflicted on those who rebelled, Bata'a became a society dedicated to freeing the oppressed and driving out the oppressors. Still, the nascent society was fractured, with jealousies and differences in religions or goals keeping the society from the unity it needed.

In the early 1800s in New Orleans, Marie Laveau and Dr. John welded the factions into a single Craft. Within 10 years, a web of *hounfour* (temples) crossed the islands, providing the Craft with a cooperative network.

A series of rebellions were repressed successively, but the people came back stronger and more determined each time. Some Traditions (notably the Celestial Chorus, the Cult of Ecstasy and even spokesmen for the Order of Reason) came to the islands seeking to find mages to enlist in the War for Ascension. None truly understood what they found.

In 1804, Hispaniola gained its independence. Other islands followed the lead swiftly. It seemed as though the Caribbean was free at last. In 1915, United States troops invaded Haiti, bringing their racism along with them. The island suffered under dictators like Papa Doc Duvalier, and it tried to find some economic stability in a land drained of resources. That strife continues today.

Even when order seems restored, the land and its spirits remain in turmoil. *Les idiots* (the name given outsiders by the Bata'a) may be mortals seeking a vacation spot or an economic windfall, or they may be mages who hope to tap into the region's rich prize of energy. Both spell disaster for the lands and people and for the Bata'a who have tried to help them.

There is much beauty in Bata'a practices, such as the concepts of two people coming together as soul mates, the giving of the self as a "horse" to the spirits, letting them use

the mortal body as a conduit and freeing and protecting their people. Yet, it is a bloody and sometimes deadly practice. They do not believe in using magic that is not received through spiritual aid. Those who do magic without thanking and rewarding the spirits are thought to be thieves and dangerously selfish sorcerers. Of course, not all spirits are equally benign. Some are quite obviously the opposite. Nor do the Bata'a expect them to be other than they are. Those who call on Baron Samedi rarely want anything other than to enslave the soul of someone who has offended. If they wanted to invoke love, they would call on someone else, like Erzulie. While they will usually send a warning to someone who is out of line, they have no problem with removing such a one if he proves intractable. The most feared method of doing this is, of course, to make the person into a zombi, thereby enslaving his soul and forcing him to obey for all eternity or until he rots completely away.

Over 100 million people follow the various religions that have ties to the Bata'a, and perhaps a thousand of those have

active knowledge of them, making Bata'a the largest Craft. Despite such numbers, the inroads made by the Technocracy and the corruption spread by other cults has had a profound effect on their viability. As fewer people believe in the old ways and more leave the islands looking for jobs elsewhere, the underpinnings of the Craft have rotted. Few have offered themselves to become horses for the spirits and those who do often have greedy motives for doing so. As they have seen that their death as a Craft is inevitable, they still do not give up. Instead, they have asked to join the Dreamspeakers and the Verbena, the only others truly capable of understanding what it is the Bata'a believe and practice. Although they no longer continue as a separate Craft, they may at last find new blood willing to learn what they can teach and to honor the spirits in the way they always have. As the Bata'a have always believed that death is merely a step apart from life, they see their Craft's death as a necessary step toward a new life as Traditionalists.

CHILDREN OF KNOWLEDGE: THE LAST TRUE ALCHEMISTS



The Children of Knowledge constitute the remnants of an ancient school of practical magic — the transformation of base materials into purer substances through the process of alchemy. Tracing their origins as far back as ancient Egypt, these mages claim descent from the followers of Thoth, the god of mathematics and science, as well as from the disciples of Hermes Trismegistus, the founder of Hellenistic magic.

Originally known as the Solificati, or Crowned Ones, the Children of Knowledge delved deeply into the organized and methodical workings of transformative magic. Specializing in the relationship between matter (as represented by the four elements) and spirit (as represented by the unifying principle of the universe), the Solificati brought the study of alchemy to its height during the Middle Ages. Amplified by the knowledge of astrology and medicine, alchemists uncovered magical secrets in their search for the perfect union of matter and spirit symbolized by the Philosopher's Stone.

The Solificati reached its height as an organized group of alchemical mages during the 13th century. Although they worked closely with the mages of the Order of Hermes, these mages refused the rigid structure of covenants, preferring to work in their solitary laboratories with only an apprentice or two for companionship and assistance. In 1315, Le Duc Luis Tristan de Varre united many fellow alchemists into a single fellowship of Solificati. The Convention of the White Tower, held in 1325, gave rise to the Order of Reason, including the Solificati among their number. Eventually, the

Solificati realized their mistake in submitting themselves to the Order's single-minded view of the universe, and they left the Order of Reason in 1335.

As more and more Solificati came under fire from the dogmatic mages of the White Tower, the alchemists realized that their only safety lay in numbers. As a safety measure, the Solificati decided to unite as a Tradition under the auspices of the Grand Convocation in 1457, becoming the keepers of the Sphere of Matter.

OUT OF THE FURNACE, INTO THE CRUCIBLE

The betrayal of the First Cabal by its Solificati member, the twin-Avatared Heylel Teomim, spelled disaster for the Tradition. Heylel's arrest, trial and sentence to the extreme punishment of Gilgul placed the entire membership of the Solificati under a pall. Unable and unwilling to bear the stigma of a house of treason, the Solificati broke with the Traditions in 1470. Fragmented among themselves by factions condemning or supporting Heylel's actions, the Solificati nearly disappeared as a Tradition for many centuries. Individual alchemists either sought refuge in the Order of Hermes or subsumed themselves in the Order of Reason, where their eccentric views of science eventually helped give rise to the Electrodyne and Difference Engineers, precursors of the Sons of Ether and the Virtual Adepts. A few Solificati vanished into anonymity, seeking solitude, as did the alchemists of older times.

One group of 12 Solificati refused to disappear but elected to change its name to the Children of Knowledge and remain together as a coherent group. Allying with, but not joining, the Order of Hermes, the Children of Knowledge traded many

of their secrets for protection, particularly during the height of the Inquisition's power.

During the late Renaissance and beyond, the Children of Knowledge enjoyed a brief respite as alchemy and astrology gained popularity once more. Their numbers grew, and the former Solificati gradually came to terms with the actions of the Great Betrayer with the benefit of temporal distance. Some members of the Children of Knowledge defended Heylel's treason, claiming that the hermaphroditic mage intended to bring about a closer bond among the Traditions by subjecting them to the rigors of persecution.

The triumph of the scientific paradigm during the height of the Industrial Revolution drove the Children of Knowledge into the background once more. Eventually, they discovered that the only way to save their view of magic was to transform it according to alchemical principles, creating a 10th Sphere that they called Unity. This inspiration gave the Children of Knowledge the impetus they needed to keep their magic, classified as a "Craft," alive into the 20th century.

IN THE END IS THE BEGINNING

The discovery during the 1940s of the effect of psycho-tropic drugs on the expansion of consciousness presented the Children of Knowledge with a new avenue of alchemy to explore. Emboldened by the new awareness of cosmic consciousness brought about by the proliferation of Eastern mysticism and hallucinogenic drugs during the 1960s, younger members of the Children of Knowledge practiced their magic more openly than ever before.

This action, however, brought them to the attention of the Technocracy and made them targets of the purges of the late 20th century. As the Technocracy expanded its attack against the Traditions to include the smaller Crafts and Disparate groups, the Children of Knowledge realized that they could no longer exist as an independent group. After a series of delicate and desperate negotiations, the Children of Knowledge rejoined the Order of Hermes officially as House Solificati in the latter years of the 20th century.

Sacrificing their hard-won independence for the dubious safety of association with a bona-fide Tradition, the former Children of Knowledge now walk a fine line under the Hermetic banner. The Hermetics watch carefully for signs of the "Heylel Syndrome" among their new brothers and sisters, while the new Solificati likewise keep a close watch on one another in order to prevent any hint of betrayal. In secret, however, a few Solificati still work to clear the name of the Great Betrayer, feeling that only by doing so will they ever remove the stigma from their House. Other Solificati try to put the past behind them and concentrate on what they believe to be the key to reversing the Technocracy's victories. Many younger members of House Solificati have devoted themselves to the study of quantum physics and string theory. As scientific knowledge crashes headlong into a wall of mystery, the alchemists of House Solificati feel confident that the application of their knowledge and approach to magic might finally bridge the gap between matter and spirit, turning the advances of the Technocracy against them.

HEM-KA SOBK: THE EATERS OF SIN



Among the oldest of the magical societies called Crafts, the Hem-Ka Sobk have always stood at odds with many other mages (whom they refer to as Hekau). The origins of the Craft lie in the ancient Egypt that existed before the dynasties of the pharaohs pyramids. In the lake region called the Faiyum, several hunting tribes worshiped a crocodile deity who was considered to be the judge of the dead and the devourer of unworthy souls.

With the coming of the Old Kingdom, the deity became known as Rager. He was highly respected, and crocodiles were held to be sacred in his honor. As time went on, however, Hekau priests wished to lessen Rager's importance, renaming him Sobk and relegating him to a new status as an aspect of Ra, the sun god. They agreed that he still consumed the souls of the damned, but he was no longer thought of as the judge of souls, the keeper of the keys to the afterlife or the Lord of Bakhu (known to the Ahl-i-Batin as Mount Qaf).

The priests sought to stifle the god's worship further by encouraging the pharaohs to reclaim the lake regions for agriculture. Today the Faiyum is one of Egypt's most heavily populated regions, and the lake area is only a fifth as large as it once was. Without his waters, the priests reasoned, Sobk could not prosper. By the time the Hekau priests had accomplished their goal, however, the true adherents of the crocodile god had abandoned the concept of Rager. That name was a false aspect of the god rather than the god himself, anyway, given to the newcomer kingdoms to placate them, but without real power.

Those who worshiped the real deity had changed their name to the Hem-Ka Sobk (utilizing their deity's new name for their own benefit) and made themselves such an integral part of the people that it was impossible to oust them.

The Hem-Ka Sobk did not heed the call to join with the Traditions. They have always found other magical groups suspicious, with the exception of the Ahl-i-Batin, whom they consider somewhat like spiritual cousins. Most

Traditions forgot that the Hem-Ka Sobk even existed. A brief mention of them in the 15th century by one of the Ali-beh shaar, the Batini representative to the Council of Nine, and a brief attempt by Arabian wisewomen to locate them in Thebes sometime later constitute most of what is known. The only other report of them came in the 20th century after Mount Qaf's sundering, when a Dreamspeaker Chantry reported seeing some among Cairo's homeless. They hold themselves apart from other mages.

The Hem-Ka Sobk have always served within the community. Those who act as the priests of Sobk form two groups within the society. The first faction consists of part-time priests called Kheri heb ashau. They may have access to limited power (sorcery) given to them according to need. Different ones might have knowledge of the paths of Ephemera, Healing or Herbalism. Each path and ritual they learn requires a different scar to act as a focus. Kheri heb ashau live among the people acting as priests and serving the community. They may grow hair, wear whatever they need, marry and even hold regular jobs as long as they share their income with the community. Their position can be passed on to a son or daughter. Despite the respect they receive from the community, outsiders think of them as "lesser" priests since they are not true mages. In modern times, the Kheri heb ashau live among the homeless of Cairo helping to scour the trash heaps of the city for useful items, teaching the young to survive, healing ills and dispensing justice. Few of them ever join the ranks of the Sunu, for their backgrounds are usually quite different.

The second group within the society is the Sunu and the high officials known as the Kheri heb tep. All of these mages are Awakened, and they are awarded a greater part of Sobk's power than the part-time priests. Those outside the society sometimes call the Sunu Sobk's assassins. Greatly respected and feared, they believe they carry out Sobk's judgments, literally serving as the teeth of the crocodile god. Every Sunu is a hunter atoning for a terrible life. He or she may have killed, raped, tortured or committed other heinous acts. Each one dies in his sleep, meets the crocodile god and is offered the choice between eternal destruction or the chance to atone. Those who wish to atone become the Sunu. As a sign of their repentance, they must remain bald and clean-shaven, they cannot marry or have children, and they may wear only what others give to them. They are required to live within the community and serve its needs when not attending to their duties as Sobk's hunters. The Sunu sharpen their teeth and scar themselves ritually. Each scar is a focus for their magic, which is granted through Sobk.

The Hem-Ka Sobk believe that when Sobk's worship was widespread, he granted his faithful shards of his own Sekhem (the power that fuels magic, or in this case his Avatar). As his worship declined, the Sekhem he gave to others was lost, being born into those who never Awakened or who turned away from his gift. It is the duty of the Sunu



to find those who contain one of Sobk's shards and judge them. If the person is found worthy, she is either offered the chance to join the Hem-Ka or left ignorant and allowed to go her way. The Sunu hunt and kill those they find unworthy. They then devour the person's liver (to prevent him from ever being reborn, they say) and return the heart to Sobk so the god may regain his lost Sekhem. Rather than returning them to Sobk directly, though, they send the hearts to the Kheri heb tep as Sobk's spokesmen and representatives.

The Kheri heb tep are drawn from those Sunu who have made their peace with their past and now serve Sobk out of love rather than duty or fear. These high priests listen for and interpret the god's instructions for the rest of the society. Although the Sunu and Kheri heb tep are all Awakened, they do not believe that magic is something born into them. Rather, it is a gift bestowed on them by the god to assist them in their duties.

Recently, the Kheri heb tep and the Sunu were found dead the morning after one of the Hem-Ka Sobk's most important rituals. The bodies were twisted as if the priests had died in intense pain. All were desiccated and covered with hundreds of tiny bite marks. The Kheri heb ashau sealed off the ritual area with magical wards and the scant materials at hand. The next night, the seals were broken. Shortly afterward, the Kheri heb ashau began demanding human sacrifices to satisfy Sobk, and a few claimed the title of Kheri heb tep. The Sunu have not re-formed.

The vagrants must now provide their priests with humans to sacrifice to Sobk to keep the protection the priests provide, and they've taken to abducting lone tourists. The sacrifices suffer the same agonizing death the true Kheri heb tep suffered. Some whisper that Sobk no longer truly guides the priests, that the Kheri heb tep's wisdom is lost forever and that the common priests serve some kind of demon.

KOPA LOEI: KEEPERS OF THE ISLANDS



Connected intimately to the lands and waters of their island homes, the shamanic mages known as the Kopa Loei practiced a form of magic that emphasized the ties between the people and their ancestors. Honoring a pantheon of gods that included Pele, goddess of volcanoes, Maui the trickster, Kane, the chief of the gods and Kamohalo'i, the shark god, the Kopa Loei protected and channeled the mana (or power)

of the land and its deities. Through the use of elaborate ritual chants and a complex system of religious rules and prohibitions (known as kapu or tabu), these shamans held together the fabric of island society and interpreted the wisdom of the gods and ancestors.

Counting both Awakened mages and practitioners of hedge magic among their numbers, the Kopa Loei made no distinction between magical Spheres. They saw magic as an extension of the natural world as evidenced through the nature gods worshiped by the islanders. Tribal chiefs, called ali'i, served as repositories for mana and caretakers of the land, distributing their Quintessence wherever it was needed. Kahunas filled many positions in island society, depending on their magical preferences. Some kahunas acted as healers, while others foretold the future, interpreted omens, summoned spirits (both friendly and malicious) and commanded the forces of nature. Both ali'i and kahuna came primarily from the ranks of the nobility, and most of these shamans possessed Awakened Avatars. A third class of Kopa Loei, the Wayfinders, had its roots among the common-born, and it often relied on simple hedge magic rather than true magic. The Wayfinders practiced small spells that had more practical applications to everyday life.

For centuries, the Kopa Loei had no contact with mages outside of their island realms. They focused all their attention on serving the gods, safeguarding the lands and waters, and shepherding their people. Although they received a summons, along with other tribal mages, to the Grand Convocation of the 15th century, only a few Kopa Loei made the arduous journey through the spirit world to investigate the strange haoli (foreign) sorcerers. Sensing the European mages' disdain for tribal mages and seeing little reason to unite themselves with people so different from themselves, the Kopa Loei refused to join the Traditions. They returned home to their islands and put the experience out of their minds.

THE WORLD INVADES

The islands of the southern Pacific first came to the attention of European explorers in the 18th century, during the time of the great maritime explorations. When rumors of the fabulous wealth, seductive practices and fertile lands of Polynesia reached Europe, the great trading companies of western Europe leapt to take advantage of the newly discovered regions. Members of the Seekers of the Void made preliminary assessments of the culture and magical practices of the mages of the Hawai'ian Islands and the other lands of Micronesia and Polynesia. Their reports to the Order of Reason resulted in a calculated effort by the Technocratic mages to destroy the threat posed by the Kopa Loei, whose magic followed no known laws of Enlightened Science.

Taking advantage of a widespread legend among the islanders that predicted the return of the god Lono, the Order of Reason used Captain Cook's arrival at Kealakekua Bay as a means of gaining the respect and awe of the Hawai'ian

islanders. Believing Cooke's ship to be the "floating island" of the prophecy of Lono's return, the native population opened their hearts and minds to the newcomers — and soon paid the price for their trust. As foreign diseases decimated the population, the agents of the Technocracy set about imposing their vision of the world upon the weakened islanders.

Although they tried to fight the encroachment of haoli ways, the Kopa Loei suffered from lack of organization against the Order of Reason. In addition, Christian missionaries (well-meaning and otherwise) flocked to the islands seeking to convert and civilize the "primitive" natives. Among these religious proselytizers were a few narrow-minded members of the Celestial Chorus, prompted by their refusal to recognize the validity of the islanders' beliefs.

For the next 200 years, the Order of Reason helped solidify the advance of Western civilization in Polynesia. Because their refusal to join the Council of Nine effectively guaranteed that the Kopa Loei would receive little or no support from the Traditions, the indigenous mages of the Pacific islands waged a losing battle to save their lands and their magic. Despite the recognition of Hawaii's independence by the United States, the forces of the Cabal of Pure Thought, acting in concert with their European political allies, managed to wrest control of the land from the Kopa Loei. While England and the United States vied for ownership of the islands, the Technocracy worked continuously to undermine the basis of native magic. Japanese interest in the islands also complicated matters, introducing yet another foreign influence that negated the native culture and weakened its magical underpinnings.

The aftermath of the Second World War had a devastating effect on the Kopa Loei throughout the South Pacific. The rapid exploitation of Hawaii as a center for commercial and recreational enterprises as well as its strategic position in global politics brought technological advances to the region and lured the natives away from their traditional way of life. Atomic testing throughout the smaller islands of the South Pacific provided an ideal excuse to evacuate whole island populations, forcing them to assimilate into other cultures and weakening the ties between the people and the land.

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

By the late 20th century, the Kopa Loei had almost disappeared from existence except for a few isolated enclaves of entrenched traditionalists. As their numbers diminished, however, the native mages of the Pacific Islands found within themselves a rising anger. Younger members of the Kopa Loei, in particular, gained support for a campaign emphasizing native pride and a return to traditional ways. A few of the Kopa Loei realized that their only hope for survival lay in compromise, so they approached the Traditions with a plea for aid. While many Traditions refused to hear the cries of the Kopa Loei, the Dreamspeakers responded with an offer to accept the shamans of the South Pacific into their varied ranks. This tentative alliance between the Kopa Loei and the Dreamspeakers has given the Polynesian mages a new chance at reclaiming their place in the world they once ruled. Although much of their magic has disappeared, along with their connection to the land, the Kopa Loei hope that their efforts may one day bring back the worship and favor of their ancient gods.

WU LUNG: DRAGON WIZARDS



The Wu Lung have existed for over 4000 years, even though their formal structure began only after the reign of Qin Shihuang, the First Emperor who unified China in 221 BCE. Mages of the society claim that their magic comes as a gift from their ancestors, who grant them their Avatars. Sprung from the nobility and highly cultured, the Wu Lung served as advisors and sorcerers to the Imperial Chinese Court. They have always played a role in the cultural and political life of China until recent times.

The society's magic is concerned with the dead and the afterlife, or rather the many hells and heavens that make up the Chinese afterlife. They hold that all has an order to it, and everything must find its place within that order. As the heavens themselves bow to a Celestial Bureaucracy, all things under it ought to be as orderly.

Their magic is very regimented, with novices discovered through divination and consultation with the mages' ances-

tors and those of the candidate. The chosen one's ancestors then guide him to his place within the Wu Lung hierarchy and constitute his Avatar. As they traffic with the dead so frequently, many Wu Lung assume antiquated styles of dress and manners, appearing in private as Mandarin lords or speaking with overly correct formality. The ancestors prefer it that way. Even quite modern Wu Lung may adopt such a style. Due to the last few decades of persecution and exile, however, they do so only in private, never when such might betray them to their enemies.

The true rise of the Wu Lung came when one of their greatest wizards, named Fu Xia, used his connections with the dead and the Celestial Bureaucracy to gain a place of power for the emperor in the afterlife. Since then, almost all the emperors have had Wu Lung advisors (even during the Mongol reign). Becoming so entrenched in the government, they embraced the concepts of Legalism, a system of harsh but realistic laws. They used their position to crush their magical rivals, especially those of the Wu-Keng (whom they called

Nung War or “peasant wizards”) and the Akashic Brotherhood. By doing so they hoped to maintain harmony and balance as Heaven commanded.

In 1321, a faction of the Wu Lung who were staunch Legalists and who had become Artificers split from the group, attended the Convention of the White Tower and joined the Order of Reason. Centuries of good relations followed, as the Order agreed with the Wu Lung in the need for law and discipline in magical workings. Although they were approached to attend the Grand Convocation, early hostile contact with the Order of Hermes and the fact that the Akashics were also invited colored their decision to decline the invitation.

In the 17th century, prompted by the emperor’s fear of the fighting prowess of the Shaolin, the Wu Lung offered him their magic and martial abilities to combat them. There ensued legendary battles in the streets between the Wu Lung and the Akashics whose stronghold lay in the Shaolin Temple. The Wu Lung helped the emperor’s troops storm the Temple, shattering the Akashics’ power in China and creating great enmity between the two magical societies.

When the Order of Reason metamorphosed into the Technocratic Union, however, the Wu Lung found themselves betrayed by the Artificer’s knowledge of the Dragon Wizards’ ways. The Technocracy invaded with guns and ships more advanced than anything China could devise, and it looted the country through swindles as well. When Japan invaded in the 1930s, the Wu Lung’s power collapsed.

The Dragon Wizards’ belief in tradition and guidance by their ancestors fit quite poorly with Communism and the Craft had to go underground in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. Although they have modernized to some degree (even to the point of beginning to accept women within their ranks), they still hold with ancient rituals and practices. Their structure is very hierarchical, with the T’ien K’ung te Huang Ti Wu Lung (heavenly Emperor of the Dragon Wizards) acting as supreme head of the order. The Feng Huang Hou Wu (Phoenix Empress-Wizard) is his wife, and she sits just below the emperor. The third great leader is the Hu Kuei Tsu Wu or Tiger Lord Wizard who commands the Dragon Emperor’s military forces. Below them come eight lords, overseers of such departments as education, provisions, intelligence, traditions and legalism. One step below are the minister who keep the records of the Wu Lung’s magical knowledge. Teacher, wizards and students follow, each in their rank, each ranked within his strata.

Because of their adherence to tradition and their respect for the ancestors and bureaucracy, the Wu Lung have always had good relations with the Celestial Bureaucracy. Their influence in establishing the First Emperor as Emperor of the Dark Kingdom of Jade grants them favors from that august personage as well. Neither has made modern life any easier for the Dragon Wizards, however. The Wu-Keng, long rivals of the Wu Lung, helped to drive them out of China as “the people” of Mao’s new China rose to prominence. Although they have hidden in Hong Kong and attempted to strike back into China from that relatively safe harbor, even that tactic has become difficult. With the return of Hong Kong to China, the Wu Lung have run out of bolt holes. Assailed by their enemies and reeling from how few Chinese still practice or have respect for the old ways, they can no longer remain viable as independents.

Recently, tremendous storms swept across the Dark Umbra, sweeping away many of the Wu Lung’s ancestors and changing the spiritual landscape in ways unforeseen. Even worse was the loss of the T’ien K’ung te Huang Ti Wu Lung’s (Heavenly Emperor of the Dragon Wizard) Tsu Tsung (Avatar) to the raging storms. His wife, the Feng Huang Hou Wu (Phoenix Empress-Wizard), and the Hu Kuei Tsu Wu (The Tiger Lord Wizard) took the former emperor and retreated to a heavenly Realm where they would be safe from the storms. Immediately thereafter, all reliable communications with them (and the other powerful masters who left to avoid the same fate) were lost.

The remaining Wu Lung chose replacements for their top ranks quickly. Three accomplished Dragon Wizards arose to heights they may as yet be unprepared to handle, but they are the best the Wu Lung have to offer. Bai Beishi, known for his serenity, balance and wisdom, was chosen to replace the emperor. Xi Zhuanji, the most accomplished shapeshifter within the Wu Lung, became his empress. Finally, Bai Beishi chose the ferocious and intimidating Choujingcha Yuguo to replace the Tiger Lord Wizard as the military leader.

Upon his ascension, the new T’ien K’ung te Huang Ti Wu Lung consulted the *I Ching* for direction. The divination disturbed him, but he presented the answer to the empress and the Tiger Lord Wizard, and together they concurred that they must follow through and seek alliance with their ancient enemies, the Akashic Brotherhood. Together, they could survive. Apart, the Five Metal Dragons (the Technocracy) would rip them to pieces. This decision was not popular with all of the Dragon Wizards, but most followed their new emperor. What will come of this alliance remains to be seen.

THE FEW, THE PROUD, THE FRAGILE

Not every splinter group has been subsumed into the Traditions or died out. A few remain independent. Stubborn and proud, they cling onto the old ways with a vehemence that can only be admired — or pitied.

AHL-I-BATIN

Although they once held the seat now occupied by the Virtual Adepts in the Council of Nine, the Ahl-i-Batin remain little known by most Tradition mages. Those who have heard of the Batini either assume they were wiped out by the Technocracy's incursion into the Middle East or believe them to be a powerless and almost memberless Craft barely surviving into the modern age. While the Ahl-i-Batin have weathered much and fallen greatly during the centuries since their inception, they have yet to disappear or be subsumed entirely by one of the Traditions. The Subtle Ones long ago mastered hidden arts and misdirection. Perhaps they only conceal their numbers until the time is right for their re-emergence.

BACKGROUND

The Ahl-i-Batin grew out of the combination of the fringe elements of two Traditions as they sought safety from enemies belonging to other Traditions. During the Himalayan Wars of 900-600 BCE, a sect of Handura (that later joined the Euthanatos) fought viciously to expel the Akashic Brotherhood from the lands of the Indian subcontinent. Within the Akashics existed a group of young acolytes and Initiates who all practiced the trade of building and stonemasonry. While traveling between monasteries, these young Brothers were cut off from their fellows by a Euthanatos ambush that almost destroyed them as they fled through the Khyber Pass into lands now called Afghanistan.

There they came upon a group of Ecstatic dervishes, and they joined the dance, moved by some unknown impulse. During this passionate, yet disciplined outpouring, one of the Brothers and one of the Ecstatics merged together, blossoming into a two-faced entity called the Khwaja al-Akbar. This entity revealed to the newly formed group the Doctrine of Unity. In the Unity, all pieces of Divinity would be reunited into a whole — ascendant and perfect. The Khwaja al-Akbar called for the group to develop a new Path, one whose mission was to create a great mandala of energy across the face of the Earth. This mandala would focus Sleeper and Awakened alike on achieving an ascendant state of being. They would find a Correspondence Point of space and time and of Universal Mind wherein all would benefit and become as one. The doctrine espoused cooperation and the recognition that all the doctrines of the Path to Ascension hold a certain commonality. All would strive together so that they could overcome their enemies and prosper in unity.

Ironically, their call to unity was interrupted by the arrival of members of the Celestial Chorus incensed by the Ecstatics, and a war party of the Handura bent on annihilating the Akashic Brothers. The Night of the Fana, as it was called, ended in a battle so fierce that the once fertile plain became the Great Desert of Death, which covers most of modern Afghanistan.

The newfound Tradition survived, but it did not reveal itself to other mages for centuries afterward, electing instead to work in subtle ways that benefited Persia and other Middle Eastern lands. These mages are credited with creating *qanats*, underground channels that transported melted snow across deserts to fill the fountains and water the gardens of great cities. The cities themselves were laid out in mandala patterns linked by a web of trade routes.

Melding their Arts with the revelations of the Khwaja al-Akbar, the Batini discovered a place outside time and space, a place they perceived as Mount Qaf, the heart of creation. This Realm consisted of a great mountain resting upon a plain that surrounded it. The Batini saw the plain as the world of Sleepers, with the rising slopes being mages with ever greater understanding and accomplishment. At the highest levels rested oracles, Celestines and Pure Ones. At the peak lay Unity, the One, which some called Prime and which was thought to embody the Correspondence Point containing all things.

The Batini chose to make themselves partially known in the wake of a series of terrible raids by Marauders and Djinni hordes that preyed on travelers in the wastes between cities. Most Batini embraced the faith of Islam as embodying many of the tenets they held dear as mages. The idea of a single, unifying faith and one God both enriched and helped shape their practices and beliefs. Such beliefs led to the formation of a great plan to undo the depredations of the Marauds. Tradition representatives thus awoke to find written plans to unify the cities with a web of Nodes linked around a central axis. Accompanying the plan was an engraved invitation to discuss the plan, signed by powerful members of the Hermetics, Akashics and Ecstatics. The location was the home of a rich merchant. Such a plan could break the power of the Marauds and stood to benefit all.

Tradition representatives discovered during the meeting that a coalition of minor Crafts was the originator of the plan, which called for Quintessence to be channeled across the wastes through the prayers and actions of human agents. Sent to a central Node, Quintessence would then be

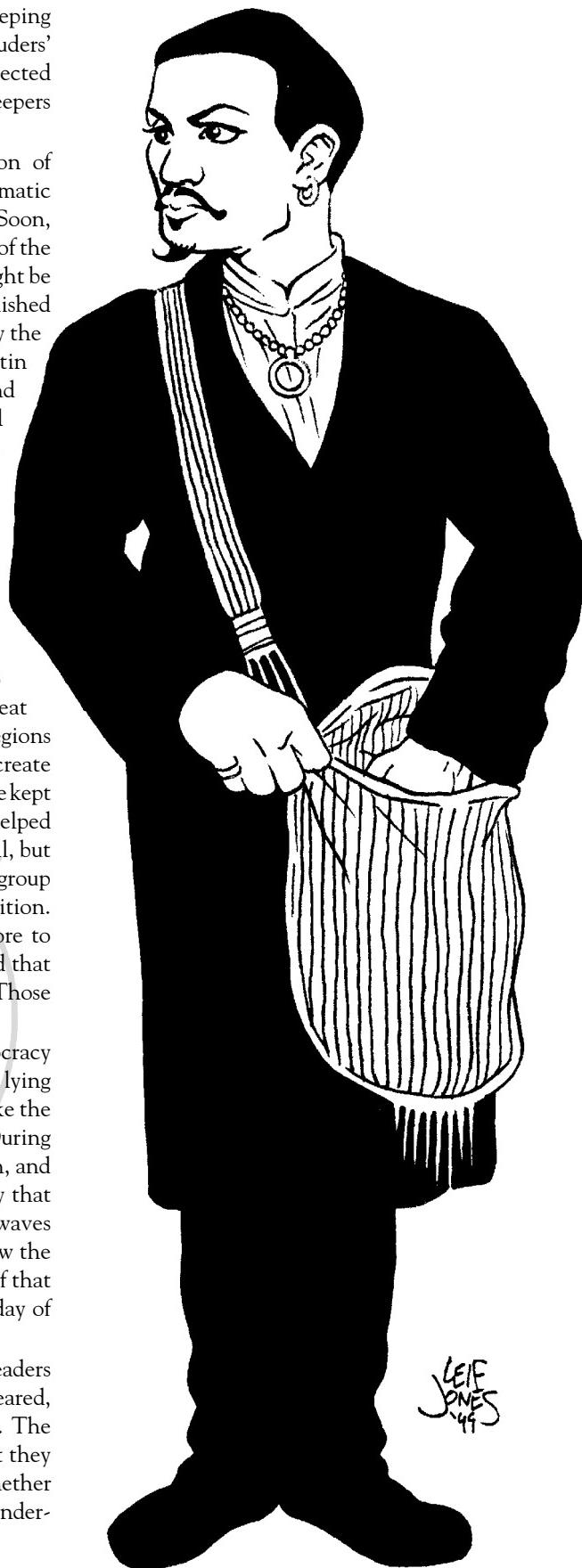
sent back out to the contributing array of Nodes, sweeping across the land as needed and eradicating the Marauders' hold. Known as the Web of Faith, it performed as expected and raised the culture and civilization even for the Sleepers whose lives it touched.

With its success, however, came a proliferation of religious sects and minor cults formed around charismatic leaders who could tap into the energy of the Web. Soon, the Traditions began trying to cut various factions out of the Web, fearing that their reasons for using the power might be lies or that their power would outstrip those of established Traditions. Fearing a bloodbath like that unleashed by the Handura, a few of the true Masters of the Ahl-i-Batin revealed themselves to several Tradition leaders and showed them Mount Qaf. They explained their goal of leading all to the Ascendant Peak of Unity and told them of their continuing fear to reveal themselves so long as the Handura existed. Although the rest of the Tradition mages remained ignorant of their true nature, the Batini thus gained some powerful allies and prevented full-scale religious war.

Even though they were scattered, the Batini kept in touch through a network of Masters of the Mind Sphere who could pass information from one group to another at the speed of thought. They drew upon a great reserve of Quintessence lying beneath their home regions to power their magic, using the *qanat* to channel it to create temporary nodes when needed. Both these practices were kept secret from the other Traditions. Batini diplomats helped lay the groundwork for the Council of the Nine as well, but when they took their appointed seat they did so as a group of loosely affiliated Crafts called the Geometric Coalition. Many council members suspected that there was more to the Subtle Ones than was apparent, but they believed that they were too disorganized to constitute any threat. Those who knew the truth kept the Batini's secret.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Technocracy gained knowledge of the reserves of Quintessence lying beneath the Middle East. The Union attempted to take the region for itself, which resulted in horrific battles. During the conflict, Mount Qaf was shut away from the Earth, and both sides were denied entry to the Realm. Some say that Mount Qaf was destroyed in the battle, sending shock waves throughout the Umbra. Others claim that what is now the Digital Web is the remains of the shattered foothills of that great mountain, which will only be restored on the day of Ascension.

Badly wounded and with no haven available, the leaders of the Batini cut their ties to their Disciples and disappeared, vowing that someday they would return in triumph. The Batini broke with the other Traditions, claiming that they would protect their own homelands, then vanished. Whether the Masters were hunted down and destroyed or went under-



ground and have plans to re-emerge is unknown to Tradition, Technocracy or even their own followers.

Still, rumors abound. Following the World Wars, finding a Batini mage seemed impossible. Most hide their abilities and fade into everyday jobs as museum curators, restaurateurs, architects, computer analysts, even shopkeepers and janitors. Some mages claim that certain respected religious leaders in the Middle East are actually Batini. Others note that many Middle Eastern potentates have purchased lands in far-flung areas of the world — lands that hold power within or under them. A few Tradition scholars have noted that the Dreamspeakers and the Order of Hermes have recently gained a few converts who espouse a philosophy suspiciously like the Doctrine of Unity. As always, the Subtle Ones remain mysterious and hard to pin down. In light of recent events, as the Technocracy seems to have won the War of Ascension, some among the Traditions look east once again, hoping that some unifying principle might emerge from the hidden mages of the Ahl-i-Batin to once again breathe life into their beleaguered ranks.

ORGANIZATION

Once, the Ahl-i-Batin were highly organized. Teachers and students gathered into *khanaqahs* or lodges, which might be thought to be trade guilds, secret societies or religious schools. Each had a *shaykh* (or council of *shaykhs*) in charge. Students were taught the mysteries and initiated into the Batini upon achieving certain insights. Those who achieved Rank 3 in a Sphere became *Murids*, who know the outer mysteries and doctrines, but have no real knowledge of the inner mysteries. Masters became *Murshids*, who gain access to the full knowledge inherent in the Batini Tradition. Once the group met frequently, though often only through telepathic communication. Since the Technocracy's triumph, they no longer meet, and communications are sporadic at best. Many have joined the Dreamspeakers or the Order of Hermes as their own group has dwindled. Other refuse to surrender, maintaining their independence proudly. Such individuals become ever more secretive, however, as they are hunted down and killed.

Originally, each *khanaqah* prided itself on its own initiation rites designed to reward those who passed their tests to become *Murids*. Those who became *Murshids* underwent a lengthier trial involving demanding scholarship. Often sacred geometry or mathematical equations that could not be solved were used as means to focus the mind and increase understanding for those undergoing the test. Today, if a candidate can even find someone to initiate her, she rarely goes beyond the *Murid* level. Batini today join whatever religious sect is prevalent in their area, usually a variant of Shi'ite Islam. Most recently, some few adherents have attempted to initiate themselves, at least to the extent of testing themselves and attempting to reach out to their

Avatars for greater understanding and wisdom. Whether they have achieved any great success is unknown.

The Batini once drew from healers, teachers, architects and followers of odd religious or mystical sects. To some extent they still do so, when possible. In modern times, however, they are more likely to seek among the poor but clever, or approach those with mathematical or musical talent. Sadly, few still actively seek acolytes, and the Craft is dying.

PHILOSOPHY

Within everyone, even the Unbelievers, there slumbers a piece of the Divine. If these pieces could all Awaken and be brought into unity with one another, all humanity would see the face of Allah and be as one with Him. The wise seek to bring about unity in all that they do. It is the Batini task to work to bring this about. Perhaps if such can be done, men will once again be worthy to walk the slopes of Mount Qaf, where all things are the One that embodies the many.

FAILINGS

The Batini Web of Faith is strong, but people have always been weak. In their attempt to bind everyone through high ideals, the Batini were blind to the parched souls of human shortcomings. They paid dearly for this lack of vision. Corrupt politicians, military exchanges and religious schisms rocked the Middle East and tore apart their foundations. Instead of accepting that some humans will choose evil and depraved paths when given the opportunity for enlightenment, the Batini chose to cut themselves off from all such influences. Batini mages went through difficult and painful rituals to excise from themselves the taint of Entropy, and indeed, many did not use the Sphere at all. Some even claimed to infiltrate the Nephandi due to the incorruptibility of their souls with Entropy removed. Sadly, this proved to be not the case. Batini *barrabi* could and did betray their brothers, while many *Murshids* lost touch with the natural cycle propounded by Entropy. Only recently have the Batini begun to return Entropy grudgingly to the fold of their studies, and many still feel that destructive and chaotic systems stand against the Unity for which they strive.

TOOLS AND STYLES

Most Batini still practice their magic through prayer, chants, music and meditation. Many use higher mathematics to release their minds from mundane thought. Others meditate on religious or arcane teachings and riddles. Some modern Batini embrace the use of modern music (from thrash metal to trance tunes) and frenzied dance (a tradition since the time of the dervishes) as tools to release their magical powers.

The Ahl-i-Batin have always been most concerned with the Spheres of Mind and Correspondence. Their concept of Unity resembles the theory of the Correspondence Point,

but it incorporates the idea of mind, soul and the spirit into the idea of a singular point in space and time. Their study of Mind came as a result of their earliest members' association with the Akashic Brotherhood. Until this century, Mind masters among the Batini served as living conduits for telepathic communications across the Middle East, Central Asia and Northern Africa. When the Technocracy discovered and destroyed them, they also gained insight into the Truths known to these Batini Masters. Such knowledge assisted the rise of the Virtual Adepts, who adapted it to their own Web.

Specialty Sphere: Correspondence

Common Foci: Prayers and meditation, mathematical conundrums, compass, triangle, ruler, dance, music, creating mandalas.

Concepts: Arabian prince, beggar, camel-driver, civil engineer, computer scientist, dervish, mathematician, musician, nomad, priest, swordsman

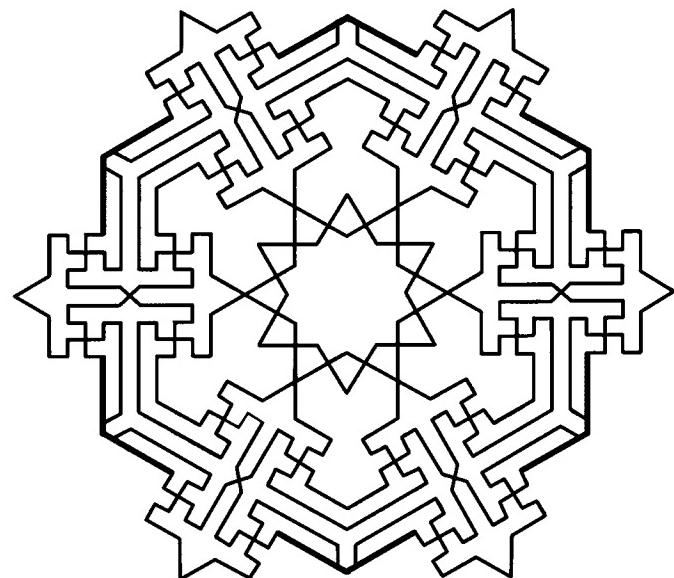
STEREOTYPES

Tradition Mages: We sought to organize them and guide them toward Unity, yet they failed to aid us when the Technocrats invaded our lands. Some among them—the Hermetics, the Chorus—we still acknowledge as friends, if not particularly reliable ones. Others, such as the Euthanatos, who harbor the Handura within their midst, we shall never trust. They may be part of the One, but we will not deal with them until we are stronger.

The Technocracy: Once we would have welcomed some of their ideas and taught them of Oneness, but they betrayed our few overtures and sought instead to steal from us. They have slaughtered our people and deprived us of our Holy Mount, and now they try to silence us entirely with their so-called modern education for our young. We do not fight them overtly, but battles occur on many levels.

Sisters of Hippolyta: If we could convince the Sisters to give up their stance on pacifism and join with us, we might save both. Sadly, although their hearts are good, their sisterhood is weak. Healing and non-aggression are fine pursuits, but among the lions of the world, they will probably not survive long.

The Lost Crafts: While we can regret the passing of many, we cannot but hope that they have found refuge within other, stronger Paths.



SISTERS OF HIPPOLYTA

With the world plunging into decay and abandonment, with a powerful Technocracy waging war on every stubborn mystical Tradition, there seems little hope for succor or a moment's peace. Still, some adherents of old ways remember days of peace, cultures that fostered healing and a mendicant philosophy. One such group is the Sisters of Hippolyta. From roots in pacifistic Greek philosophy, the Sisters survive as a loose coalition of healers, peacekeepers and wise women. Unwilling to commit to warfare and ever-vigilant in the secrecy of their group, the Sisters have survived where other militant or more public Crafts have died.

BACKGROUND

The women who call themselves the Sisters of Hippolyta trace the origins of their school of magic (and way of life) to the warrior queen of the Amazons from whom they take their name. Born from the mythical division within the Amazons over whether or not to participate in the Trojan war, the Sisters of Hippolyta comprise the spiritual (and, in some cases, literal) descendants of those who chose not to take part in the wars of men. One legend held by the Sisters tells of a sacrifice made by the Amazons to the goddess Athena as an atonement for allying themselves with the Trojans. According to the pact made between Athena and Hippolyta, the women who chose not to take up arms in the Trojan War would exile themselves from the rest of the Amazons, thus depriving the warriors of their primary healers and nurturers. As they traveled throughout the world in nomadic groups, the exiled Sisters of Hippolyta would serve as a living testimony to the power of healing and non-violence. They would serve as teachers and caregivers wherever they were needed, and they would always hold themselves apart from the world at large.

Leaving their city of Themiscrya, in the mountains of the Caucasus, the Sisters of Hippolyta became nomads, wandering throughout Asia Minor lending whatever nurturing assistance they could to the people they encountered. As Amazons, they disavowed permanent relationships with men, taking temporary lovers or breeders in order to conceive children. Daughters remained with the Sisters, while sons became the responsibility of their fathers or else remained behind with foster parents when their mothers moved on to new lands. The Sisters promoted knowledge of healing and medical techniques, sharing their nurturing skills with everyone. As they continued their wanderings, the Sisters strengthened their commitment to peaceful solutions, eschewing warfare as a tool of men.

Although remaining independent of male control proved difficult in a time of patriarchal tyranny, the Sisters managed to preserve their autonomy through a policy of fierce separa-

tion. Since they lived as nomads, they succeeded in remaining apart from the newly emerging empires and kingdoms.

The destruction of Themiscrya by Alexander the Great in 329 BCE solidified the exile of the Sisters, since they no longer had a home to return to even if they could. One legend cherished by the Sisters tells of the self-destruction of the last seven Amazons in a suicide pact that used magical songs to create an earthquake that destroyed the city along with the attacking forces. Called the *Themiscryan Compact*, this example offered the Sisters of Hippolyta an extreme solution should they face similar circumstances.

In the 9th century, the Sisters found a semi-permanent home in southern France, where they took advantage of the ideal agrarian climate to establish a headquarters for their community. Here they flourished, finding temporary mates among the men of the countryside and infusing their numbers with fresh bloodlines. At the same time, the Sisters expanded their magical knowledge from a concentration on healing arts to a general focus on the connections between mind and body and the Earth.

The rise of feudalism and the growth of kingdoms under the aegis of a patriarchal Church signaled a period of tribulation for the Sisters. As independent women, they fell afoul of authoritarian males who refused to accept the possibility that women could exist without men to protect (and control) them. The Sisters' reputations as wise women, healers, miracle workers, expert farmers and animal tenders drew unwanted attention from Church fathers and, ultimately, from the Inquisition. Branded as heretics because of their refusal to live as "Christian" women (i.e., subservient to husbands and fathers) or as witches for their curious cultural mores, miraculous magical cures and insistence on their separatist lifestyle, the Sisters suffered persecution from all manner of conservative elements. The Sisters withdrew from society once again, returning to their nomadic life to escape the fires of the Inquisition.

During the Renaissance, the Sisters made tentative approaches to the outside world. Although the Inquisition still held sway throughout much of Europe and the Church maintained its iron grip on the affairs of state, an atmosphere of enlightenment and creativity provided the Sisters with the chance to interact with society at large. Once more, the Sisters shared their medical knowledge and their philosophy of connection to the Earth with anyone who would listen, but they did so with more discretion and subtlety than in the past. A pair of guiding principles emerged at this time. The first tenet of the Sisters encouraged them to spend some time in the world, learning as well as teaching. The second principle forbade the Sisters of Hippolyta from making permanent ties with anyone outside their own company. Too

many conclaves fell to betrayals by Sisters whose relations with those outside their group left them vulnerable to persecution, blackmail or other forms of pressure — including the torture of their loved ones.

In the 19th century, the rise of feminist writers like Mary Wollstonecraft brought a new awareness of the rights of women to society at large. The Sisters of Hippolyta debated the implications of these “radical” ideas. One faction advocated greater participation in society in order to encourage the spread of egalitarian ideas through example. The other, more traditional faction urged only minimal contact with society, claiming that separation from the world represented the Sisters’ only hope for survival and prosperity. Many traditionalists remained in Europe, secluding themselves in the few remaining wild places on the European continent. The more radical faction emigrated to America, where the Sisters settled primarily in the western parts of the United States and Canada. There they adopted pioneering lifestyles, living in small independent communities that maintained relations with neighboring towns. The Sisters added their efforts to the abolitionist movement in the United States and helped establish centers for social work among the poor and needy.

In the 20th century, the Sisters of Hippolyta have extended their interests to include most of the liberation movements as well as environmental and return-to-nature causes. Since they remain extremely discreet about their use of magic, they have managed to escape the notice of the Technocracy. Tradition mages, likewise, pay little attention to the Sisters, considering them as a mere “Craft” or a dying sect of eccentrics. Although some of the Sisters feel encouraged by their survival into the modern era, others feel a sense of foreboding about the future. Fearing a backlash from right-wing groups, male-dominated survivalist cults and other patriarchal organizations in response to the proliferation of free-thinking, independent women, the more cautious Sisters have already begun making preparations for a second period of persecution. For the first time in their long history, the Sisters of Hippolyta are making preparations to fight back if necessary.

ORGANIZATION

The Sisters of Hippolyta have three main conclaves (or groups) located in isolated regions of British Columbia, France and Colorado. Each Sister maintains an affiliation with one of these three major conclaves even though she may also belong to one of the many smaller conclaves spread throughout the world from the Appalachian backwoods to the Russian steppes. Each conclave supports a ruling committee, known as an *epitropi*, made up of seven Sisters who act as an informal governing body. Membership in the *epitropi* changes every seven years, and all Sisters are encouraged to consider taking her turn as one of the leaders. Although the *epitropi* exercises nominal leadership over its

conclave, most decisions come about through consensus, with the *epitropi* serving primarily as advisors or breakers of stalemates. It’s noteworthy that the Sisters don’t just include magicians among their ranks. Many women who agree with their heritage and roots, or who claim descent from their lines, live in the societies of the Sisters, and the magic of a few is just a part of the greater community.

Subcommittees made up of from two to four Sisters handle specific issues or address particular areas of life within the conclave. Subcommittee members may include Sisters outside the *epitropi*. Positions within the *epitropi* reflect the priorities of the Sisters’ philosophy. Lore-keepers maintain the records of the conclave’s membership and keep track of genealogical histories and births. These Sisters also bear the responsibility for opening lines of communication with the other conclaves. Treasurers handle the conclave’s funds, ensuring that each Sister has sufficient monies for her support when she spends time away from the conclave as well as seeing to the general financial stability of the community itself. Most Sisters make monetary contributions to the conclave upon joining, and they continue to provide financial support throughout their lives. Each Sister receives enough money to meet her specific needs. Mentors oversee the transmission of magical and other types of knowledge throughout the conclave. Mentors include both Awakened members as well as non-Awakened Sisters. Those mentors who do not possess magic pass on whatever skills and knowledge they have, whether herbal healing, artistry or medical skills. Defenders, a recent addition to the roster of positions within the *epitropi*, take charge of the security of the conclave, instructing Sisters in various types of martial arts — usually non-lethal varieties — as well as in the use of conventional weapons (in the event of a worst-case scenario). Securing the physical defenses of a conclave’s territory and screening new members also falls under the provenance of defenders.

The Sisters resolve most disputes internally, through mediation and negotiation. Lesser offenses result in penalties consisting of community service to the conclave or some other type of reparatory activity. Great offenses, such as murder or betrayal, result in permanent exile from the Sisters. Any Sister who opts to leave permanently may do so, but she will never receive any aid from other Sisters. Of course, even that rule may sometimes be bent; the Sisters are cautious, but mercy is one of their guiding tenets.

PHILOSOPHY

The Sisters of Hippolyta believe that magic comes not from the intellect but from instinct. Their approach to magical workings involves a holistic approach that takes into account mind, body and the natural cycles of the physical world. Magic comes from the connections between individuals and between the individual and the world. As a force for creation and life-giving, magic should not be perverted



for violence or aggression. The Sisters see magical energy as a dynamic, ever-changing force that adheres to cycles and remains in a state of constant flux. They refuse to pigeonhole magic into Spheres, and they consider minor workings of un-Awakened "hedge mages" as evidence that anyone can utilize the creative powers of the world.

Sisters of Hippolyta do not practice aggressive recruitment, they rely on synchronicity to bring potential members to their attention. When a Sister identifies a likely candidate for membership, she forms a personal relationship with the potential recruit in order to assess her personality, philosophy, skills and overall character. If the candidate seems promising, the Sister reports back to her conclave with a recommendation. Upon receiving the conclave's approval, the recruiter then invites the candidate to visit the conclave. If the visitor seems to fit in with the group and demonstrates a willingness to adopt the lifestyle of the Sisters, she receives an invitation to join them. A simple ceremony of initiation takes place during the time of the initiate's next menstrual cycle to emphasize the dynamic attunement to nature and change professed by the Sisters.

The lack of formality or stringent tests reinforces the Sisters of Hippolyta's philosophy of trust and equality. Unfortunately, the absence of rigorous culling techniques leaves the Sisters open to infiltration and too often exposes them to their enemies, both human and supernatural. Witch-hunters, extremists, Technocracy agents, vampires and other malevolent beings have succeeded in insinuating themselves into a conclave of trusting Sisters — sometimes leading to the destruction of the group.

FAILINGS

Some of the conclaves have come to the bitter realization that one-sided trust may well bring about the end of the Sisters of Hippolyta. These groups now exercise a modicum of caution in bringing new recruits into their midst. The institution of security checks and intensive questioning of recruits has become a common practice during the initial stages of recruitment. Although many of the Sisters mourn this loss of innocence, they cannot deny the need for self-protection.

Even though the Sisters maintain a peaceful and nurturing outlook, the fact remains that many among them keep a rather skewed view on masculinity, conflict, and just about any artifact of the outside world. Those raised among the Sisters often have difficulty adapting to the outside world. Recruits are a little more flexible, but they still find that the Sisterhood's Grecian philosophies just aren't always pragmatic in the real world. The addition of defenders to the Sisters' ranks came only after heated debate and many losses. Whether the Sisters will come to accommodate the masculine half of the life-cycle in their feminine philosophy remains to be seen.

TOOLS AND STYLES

Most Sisters of Hippolyta prefer to work their magic in a group context. Infusing songs and dances with magical energy or channeling power through the use of massage or meditation provide some of the methods whereby the Sisters bring about their miraculous healing and life-giving magic. In addition, many Sisters feel a deep connection to some goddess figure as a symbol of the Earth that they hold as a wellspring of magical energy. Although Awakened members of the Sisters can practice their magic alone, they generally do so only when they find themselves without a group of Sisters to join them.

Specialty Sphere: Life

Common Foci: Herbs, artistic expressions such as dance, song and poetry, massage, medical equipment

Concepts: Animal rights activist, child advocate, crisis counselor, emergency room doctor, environmentalist, holistic healer, midwife, teacher

STEREOTYPES

Tradition Mages: They try to regulate magic, dividing it into Spheres and schools. How can you separate one form of magic from another? They attempt to master magical energy instead of working alongside it. We would not join with them even if they wanted us to. Besides, too many of them still hold onto archaic ideas about women's roles.

The Technocracy: Their refusal to call magic by its rightful name makes them worse than the Traditions. Their desire to eradicate any kind of willworking that does not fit their definition of "science" places them irrevocably on the side of those we must oppose. They would sterilize the world and make everyone bow to the god of science.

Ahl-i-Batin: They have given themselves over to a culture that stifles their magic. We have little in common with them except our mutual refusal to join the Tradition mages.

Taftâni: Almost as irresponsible as Marauders, these grandiose mages have no sense of subtlety. Times have passed them by, yet they refuse to change. In a way, we admire their persistence. They do not have the most enlightened view of women, so we can offer them little support. Not that they would want it.

The Lost Crafts: We regret the loss of diversity. Too many groups have been forced to accept the constraints of one or another of the Traditions just in order to survive. The world is poorer for the lack of these independent groups.

TAFTĀNI

Djinni, flying carpets, magic bottles, shapeshifting men, women who peer through the veil of illusion and wooden horses that cross the world are all legends that hail from the Taftāni, the weavers of wondrous designs. From their homes in the Middle East, these sorcerers have long practiced a flamboyant and vibrant style of magic. Now persecuted by the restricted scientific world and the dying of bright magic, they clutch at the last hopes of mysticism that flow through their hands like desert sand.

BACKGROUND

Like the Ahl-i-Batin, the Taftāni claim the desert lands of the Middle East as their home. The mages who call themselves the Weavers trace their ancient lineage to the earliest period of free-form willworking, before the rise of differentiated groups of mages. Predating the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the sorcerers of Arabia, Persia and the surrounding lands honor an infinite number of deities and spirits, both beneficent and malevolent. The Taftāni base their magical workings on the belief that magic abounds throughout the universe, embodied by the spirits and demons known as djinni. The Weavers' ability to use their wills to command or bind the djinni serves both as a way for them to protect the Sleepers under their guard and as a means of exulting in their magical gifts.

Solomon the Wise, one of Israel's greatest kings and, reputedly, one of the world's most powerful sorcerers, not only practiced the rituals of Hermetic magic, but he also gained fame for his ability to bind demons. Despite Solomon's adherence to the belief in one God, the Taftāni worked closely with him during the height of the 10,000 Djinni Plague to imprison malicious spirits behind seals of power or to bind them into physical objects.

Unlike the Ahl-i-Batin, the Taftāni refused to abandon their polytheistic beliefs in favor of Islam. This steadfast adherence to their ancient doctrine of many gods and demons created a dangerous rift between the Weavers and the Batini, one that has persisted in the present. Because of their unabashed paganism, the Taftāni withdrew even further from the world around them, separating themselves from the Muslim culture in order to pursue their own paths of magic.

A few Taftāni attended the Grand Convocation of Mistridge, more out of curiosity than out of any real desire to ally themselves with other schools of magic. Declining the offer to join the newly forming Traditions, the Taftāni turned their backs on European and tribal mages, disdaining the idea of self-regulation and spurning the concept that magic should be subjected to any controls other than the will of the practitioner. Labeled as Dis-

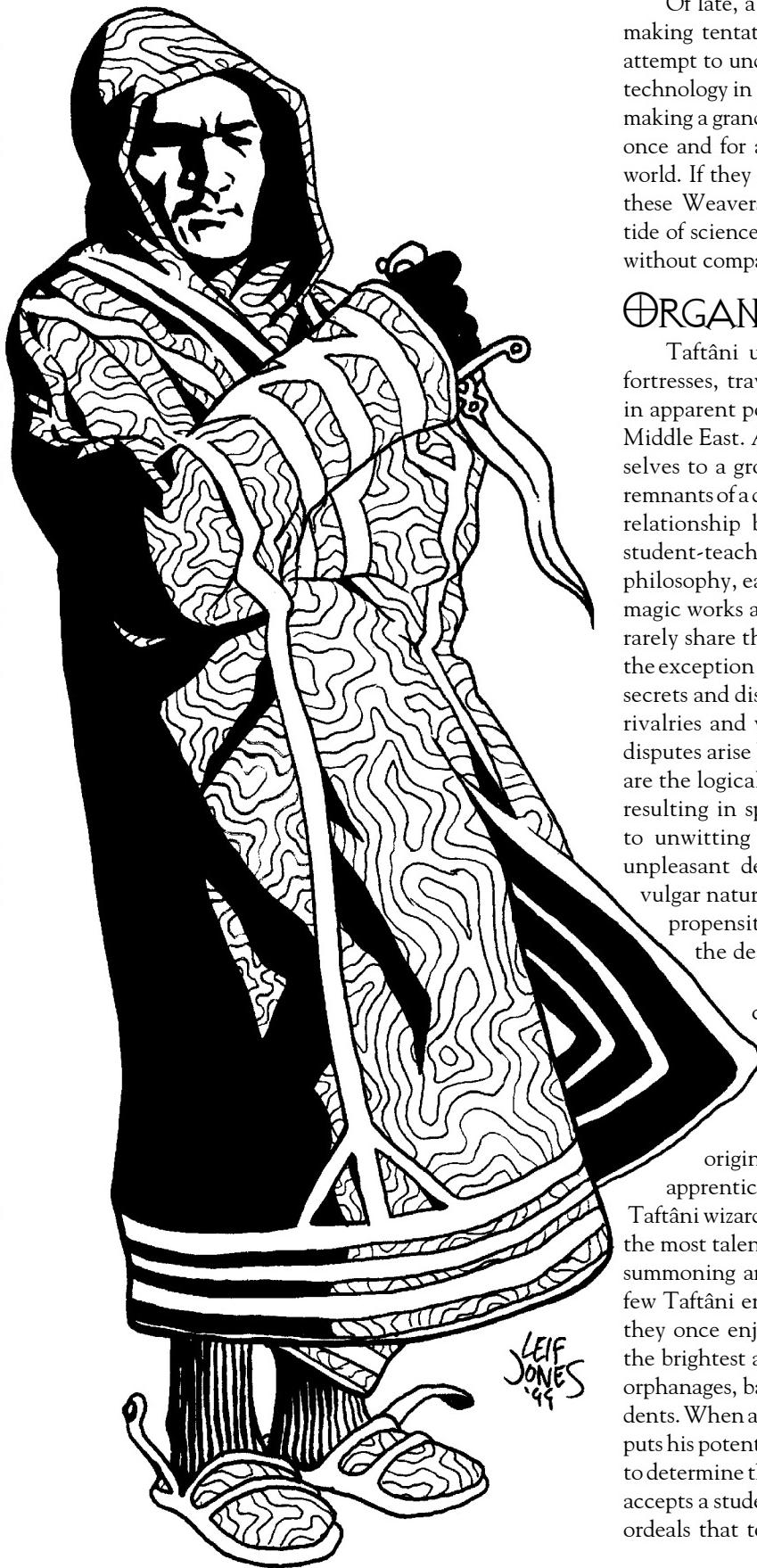
parate by the Traditions, the Taftāni lost any protection they might have gotten by submitting themselves to the Council of Nine. Most Weavers considered their status as "outcasts" among the Traditions as a fair price to pay for their freedom to practice magic in their own flamboyant and exuberant fashion.

Islamic dominance of the ancestral lands of the Weavers drove the Taftāni into hiding. Just as the Inquisition in Europe pursued and exterminated many Tradition mages, the armies of Islam hunted down and destroyed many Taftāni, labeling them infidels and infernalists. A few managed to survive, fleeing to the wildest places of the desert and erecting impregnable fortresses guarded by djinni slaves and other summoned creatures. Some retired to their cloud castles or pocket realms, where they could practice their magic without disturbance from a world that had grown increasingly hostile to them.

The popularization of the old Arabian and Persian cultures by Sir Richard Burton and other 19th century gentlemen adventurers caused a few Taftāni to relax their vigilance and come into the light once more. This brief period, however, ended with the First World War, when the Technocracy took advantage of the worldwide conflict to establish itself in the most remote parts of the world and in the heart of Taftāni magic. Once again, the Weavers retreated. Since the early 20th century, the Taftāni have held themselves apart from most world affairs, involving themselves only when absolutely necessary to protect their immediate territory or avert personal threats.

Only a few Taftāni still practice their magic in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Arabia and other parts of the Middle East. These determined individuals refuse to give up their beliefs, even in the face of tremendous hardships caused by theocratic politicians and the spread of technology to the Arab world.

Of major concern to the remaining Weavers is the need to maintain the protective wards and seals that still bind some of the more powerful djinni. Many magical lamps and other djinni-traps have disappeared into the hands of collectors or languish in museums under tight security. The Taftāni fear the weakening of these bindings and the chaos that may well follow should any of the bound creatures escape into a world where their existence violates the laws of reality. Some Taftāni attribute recent catastrophes in the Middle East as proof that at least some of these bindings have disintegrated, causing destruction and ruin in their wake. Whenever a portion of a city erupts in flames or a museum wall collapses, the nearest Weaver attempts to discover whether or not the damage came about through natural means or through the breaking of some ancient seal and the freeing of an angry djinn.



Of late, a few Weavers have begun corresponding and making tentative alliances with one another in a belated attempt to undo some of the damage done by the spread of technology in their territories. Some Taftâni have spoken of making a grand display of magic that will prove to the world, once and for all, that science describes only a part of the world. If they can demonstrate the validity of their beliefs, these Weavers feel that they can reverse the implacable tide of science and reinstate themselves as wonder-workers without compare.

ORGANIZATION

Taftâni usually operate alone, dwelling in isolated fortresses, traveling the seclusion of the desert or living in apparent poverty in the slums of cities throughout the Middle East. A few of these reclusive mages attach themselves to a group of nomads, acting as protectors for the remnants of a quickly vanishing culture. The only organized relationship between Taftâni sorcerers stems from the student-teacher bond. While all Taftâni agree on a basic philosophy, each Weaver embellishes her concept of how magic works according to her own unique vision. Taftâni rarely share their findings with others of their kind (with the exception of their students). Possessively guarding their secrets and discoveries, the Taftâni indulge themselves in rivalries and view other Weavers as competitors. When disputes arise between two or more Taftâni, magical duels are the logical form of conflict resolution — occasionally resulting in spectacular pyrotechnics that cause damage to unwitting bystanders and sometimes ending in the unpleasant demise of the loser. Sometimes the highly vulgar nature of Taftâni magic along with the Weavers' propensity for using fire as a magical weapon causes the deaths of both parties.

Only when some overriding threat demands cooperation and alliance do the Taftâni deign to work together. Such instances of organized efforts usually dissolve as soon as the danger has passed.

Following a custom as ancient as the origins of Taftâni magic, the Weavers select their apprentices with great care. Before the coming of Islam, Taftâni wizards traveled throughout their lands in search of the most talented youths to train in the mysteries of djinni summoning and binding. In the modern world, however, few Taftâni enjoy the same respect they once did. Where they once enjoyed the privilege of choosing from among the brightest and best candidates, now the Weavers comb orphanages, back alleys and black markets in search of students. When a Taftâni mage finds a promising individual, he puts his potential student through a series of tests calculated to determine the presence of magical talent. Once a Weaver accepts a student, he oversees a second battery of trials and ordeals that test the apprentice's worthiness to learn the

master's secrets. Students usually do not survive failure, since the dangers of Taftâni magic are great. In addition, apprentices must eradicate any traces of monotheism in their religious beliefs, adhering instead to the existence of a multiplicity of deities.

PHILOSOPHY

The mind conceives what the will confirms. Magic consists of channeling the creative energies of the willworker and gaining control of the spirit creatures who infuse the world with the essence of power. By commanding and harnessing the djinni, demons, angels and other spirits that embody the magical energy that permeates the universe, the Taftâni prevent these creatures from running amok in the physical world. In addition, the Weavers use the power of bound spirits to fuel their own workings. Seeing themselves as guardians of the world's magic, the Taftâni claim the right to determine how and when that magic manifests itself.

FAILINGS

The Taftâni are disorganized in the extreme. Mentors fight students, sorcerers fight one another, and each hoards his knowledge and his power over individual djinn jealously. Combined with their flamboyance, this competitiveness makes them vulnerable. Without a strong organization or even a willingness to support one another, individual Taftâni are easy prey for the Technocracy... or other parties. Taftâni don't work well with other mages, either. Their spectacular power lends them a particular arrogance, and many view the Traditions antagonistically and refuse to work with any other magic-wielder. Slowly, they're being extinguished, one at a time, as they fail to recognize the power of organized groups against their staunch individuality.

TOOLS AND STYLES

Magic, as practiced by the Taftâni, employs several techniques. Because the Taftâni emphasize the power of naming as a means of controlling the djinni and other spirits, they spend much of their time researching the true names of the creatures they wish to affect. In addition, they use elaborate rituals and mathematical formulae in the performance of their workings. Although they resemble Hermetic mages in their approach to magic, the forms their rituals take differ greatly from western Hermetic practitioners. Many Taftâni learn some form of artistry or craft as a means of focusing their will even as they create suitable vessels in which to house the spirits they bind. Thus, a Taftâni mage can weave the true name of a djinn into an intricately woven rug that serves not only as a spirit cage but also as a flying carpet powered by the essence of the imprisoned djinn. Other "djinni-traps" include rings, bracelets, lamps and similar valuable crafted items.

Specialty Sphere: Spirit

Common Foci: crafted objects, djinni-summoning and -binding rites, expressive gestures, magical formulae, languages, ritual chants

Concepts: Antiques collector, artisan, bazaar magician, beggar, nomad, professor of ancient Persian history, poet, reclusive scholar, Turkish rug vendor

STEREOTYPES

Tradition Mages: These cowards fail to realize that rules and regulations stifle magic. Controlling magic is important, but the wizard herself should exercise the power of her will. She should not have to bow to a body of superiors and beg permission to express her talents. The Council of Nine has caused the death of magic in the world.

The Technocracy: Worse than the Tradition by a matter of degree only, these soulless proponents of cold science would strip the world of everything but logic and reason. They have no true imagination, or else they fear to use their gifts for creation, preferring to regulate magic out of existence.

Ahl-i-Batin: They separated themselves forever from the true meaning of magic when they foreswore the old ways and embraced the worship of Allah. Their one god limits what they can achieve, but they are too blind to see the error of their ways. We have turned our backs on them, just as they have declared their enmity toward us. We have nothing in common anymore.

Sisters of Hippolyta: Although we understand the Sisters' desire to separate themselves from the world, we fear they have so limited their potential that they will never become more than a pale imitation of the fearsome woman whose name they honor. They hide behind walls of fear. A pity, but their destiny does not concern us overmuch.

The Lost Crafts: We always regret the departure of magic from the world. The disappearance of the Sin Eaters worries us because of the mystery it poses. The Traditions have swallowed up the rest of the Crafts, and we mourn for the end of diversity. Still, those who are not strong enough to survive deserve to disappear into the ranks of the pallid practitioners of weak magic.

TEMPLARS

The Warriors for Christ have a long and checkered history. Conspiracy theorists state that the Templar organization did not die with Jacques de Molay, but rather that it went underground. Religious students see the Templars as an expression of the greatest defenders of the Church, who became dabblers in matters that no man should master. For their part, the remaining Templars see themselves as both. They are survivors who defend the Church through the aegis of powers that they sacrifice their souls to command. If God demands a sacrifice, then their bodies and spirits will be that sacrifice.

BACKGROUND

Founded in AD 1119 to defend pilgrims in the Holy Land from attacks by infidels, the Templars were a merging of the ideals of monasticism and knighthood. Originally a group of only nine French knights, these holy warriors occupied a wing of the Latin King Baldwin's own quarters in what was once the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Thus was born their name — the Military Order of the Knights of the Temple of Solomon — more often called simply Templars. Their recognition from the Pope enjoined them to a life of poverty, chastity and obedience like many other monastic orders. They operated for nine years before receiving their official *Rule* (a formal regulatory set of instructions on how they were to eat, dress, live and function) from Bernard of Clairvaux, a well-respected Bishop and theologian. Tough and brave, the Templars fought for Christendom in the Holy Land, even gaining the respect and admiration of their foes. Their reputation as warriors who refused to retreat even against terrible odds attracted many to the order and their numbers swelled dramatically. Soon, the Knights maintained Preceptories (Chapter Houses) across all of Europe as well as the Holy Land. Many of the noble families whose sons joined their ranks gave them gifts of land, as did monarchs who valued their services at home.

The Templars' greatest achievement was to introduce the concept of banking. The rich order that was so widely spread could accept money from travelers, give those travelers letters of credit and allow the travelers to withdraw a like amount of money from one of its Preceptories in a distant location. Thus, travelers could make their journey with little fear of all their funds being stolen en route and arrive at their destination knowing their money awaited them safely in the hands of the warrior-knights. Soon, the Templars became moneylenders, offering their riches to kings and nobles in need of cash in return for interest on their investment. Such practices quickly made them even more influential as the monarchs of Europe turned to them for ready cash. Sadly, it also made the order the target of greed and envy.

The order's enemies spread rumors of their debauched practices, claiming they had fallen to heathen ways — or worse. As interest flagged in Europe, defenders stopped volunteering, and the Muslims retook all that the Latin kingdom had "liberated." With the loss of the Holy Land, no more pilgrims traveled there, and the order lost its reason for existence. Although they tried to mount campaigns to retake the Holy Land, they were unable to do so, and rumor blossomed into accusations.

In 1307, acting with the orders of the Pope he had placed upon the papal throne, Philip the Fair (the king of France) ordered the arrest of the Templars and the seizure of their houses and goods in France. Over the next few years, Templars were arrested, tortured into making bizarre confessions, tried and convicted of heresy. Some were executed; others were allowed to recant and enter other monastic orders to live a life of penance. It mystified many (particularly those who did not believe in the knights' guilt) that so many confessed to sins ranging from sodomy to heresy to devil worship and the defilement of Christ's name and image. Considering the horrible tortures they suffered, however, it should not have been surprising. Subsequent events have shown that Philip acted out of greed (he owed the Templars an enormous sum he could not repay) and that his tortures were designed to force the knights to reveal the location of their noted treasure, which was never found. He tacked on the charges to justify his treatment of the warrior-monks of Christ. Jacques de Molay, thought to be the last Grand Master of the order, later recanted his confession, claiming that his only treason was against his order for admitting to fraudulent charges to avoid further torture. He was burned at the stake, but not before he supposedly levied a powerful curse that some credit with destroying Philip.

The Pope dissolved the Templar order, and it faded from history as its surviving members disappeared into obscurity. In actuality, the Templars never died. Three of the original founders were Christian mages who belonged to the Cabal of Pure Thought. Believing that the greatest threats to good Christians were supernatural ones, they offered an alliance between the knights and the Cabal. Another magical group who would later be known as the Celestial Chorus also had ties to the Templars, but their understanding of religious doctrine admitted to non-conformist Christianity rather than strict adherence to doctrine as taught by the Church. Some members of the Knights Templar preferred the Choristers to the Cabal, which weakened the order's unity.

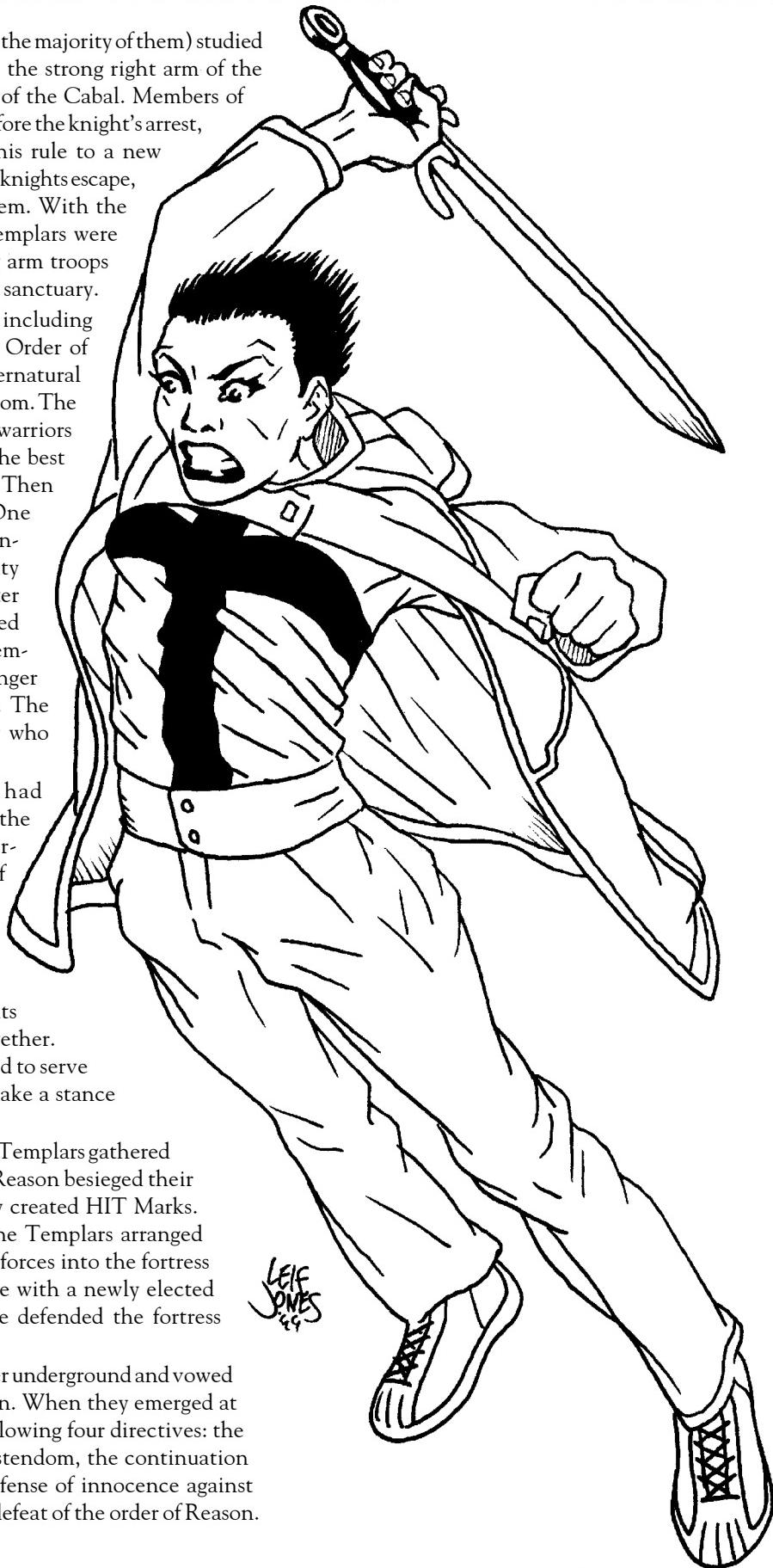
Not all Templars (or even the majority of them) studied magic. Instead, they acted as the strong right arm of the Church and as the enforcers of the Cabal. Members of the Cabal warned de Molay before the knight's arrest, allowing him to hand over his rule to a new Grand Master and help several knights escape, taking their treasury with them. With the order banned, the refugee Templars were forced into the role of strong arm troops for the Cabal in exchange for sanctuary.

In 1325, several factions, including the Cabal, united under the Order of Reason to fight against supernatural horrors threatening Christendom. The Templars were their greatest warriors armed and accoutered with the best the Artificers could produce. Then came the Reformation. "One world, one God" could no longer be argued, for Christianity fractured into dozens of splinter groups. Some Knights remained true to Catholicism; others embraced the reformers. No longer could the order fight heresy. The Knights opted to accept any who accepted Christ.

By 1837, the world had changed significantly, and the Templars were merely afterthoughts in the Order of Reason's grand plans. Needing to enforce their view of science and progress over superstition and faith, the Order of Reason revealed its plan to abandon religion altogether. The Knights would be required to serve as enlightened warriors and take a stance against all religions.

Over the next weeks, the Templars gathered and laid plans. The Order of Reason besieged their headquarters using the newly created HIT Marks. Cabal sympathizers within the Templars arranged for safe passage of the enemy forces into the fortress and the knights fled en masse with a newly elected Grand master as the old one defended the fortress and died there.

The survivors went further underground and vowed to continue their holy mission. When they emerged at last, they had adopted the following four directives: the establishment of a new Christendom, the continuation of the Templar order, the defense of innocence against supernatural threats and the defeat of the order of Reason.



Where once they had fought openly, their battlegrounds became universities, publishing houses and the political arena. They nurtured Christian ethics and beliefs in these areas covertly. Although capable of manning frighteningly well-trained soldiers to combat evil or supernaturals, they more often joust within the courtroom or the boardroom today. Those among them who are Awakened believe that their powers are granted by God.

In modern days, with the Technocracy breathing down their necks and recruitment becoming ever harder, some among them have proposed that they allow women into their strictly masculine order. Although they have not yet taken this step (they're supposed to be *monks*, after all), some few finally found it necessary to make their peace with and join the Celestial Chorus. Some have left the Templars or split from the main body, citing the Choristers' acceptance of non-Christian religions. Most, however, have reconciled themselves with the idea that even if the Choristers are misguided, at least they believe in God. They hope to use their perseverance in the face of overwhelming odds to bring the Chorus itself back to its Christian roots. Whether they can do so or not, at least they have allies against the Godless betrayers in the Technocracy.

ORGANIZATION

The Templars maintain a strict, hierarchical organization. The Grand Master keeps lifelong, absolute rule over the order. He works directly to advance God and the Church, and only by a vote of the Seneschals could he be removed. The Seneschals advise the Grand Master and often serve in coordination capacities over the entire order, taking care of treasury, training programs and military positioning. Beneath the Seneschals are Marshals, who oversee individual small countries or districts in larger countries. The Marshal reports to the Seneschals and coordinates Templar activities within his domain. Preceptors command individual Chapter Houses, staffed with Knight-Brothers and Sergeants of the Covenant (Brothers who have been recognized for particular valor or contributions). Knight-Aspirants make up the ranks of dedicated novices who hope to become members of the order.

It's important to note that, although the order does keep armed Chapter Houses, the Knights do not spend all of their days within such walls. Indeed, Knights make up usual clergy, businessmen, merchants, lawyers and other everyday professions; the Chapter House is used for meetings, training and supply storage.

Acolytes and Knight-Aspirants are selected carefully by the order and invited after careful screening. Because of the Templars' strong Church ties, only those who've shown a vision and devotion matching the order are ever admitted, and the Templars are cautious to the point of paranoia about the recruits that they'll select. Aspirants

must undergo tests, and they are often called on to assist the order in subtle ways. They also gain a modicum of training and a great deal of religious instruction. Such initiates are brought to the local Chapter House's chapel, where they undergo a ritual knighting, and the initiate makes vows to the order and is dubbed a new Brother.

The Templars do not accept women into their ranks, citing Biblical passages and tradition in their support. This practice has caused no small amount of divisiveness over policy, and indeed, some of the liberal Templars who deserted to the Celestial Chorus have taken up the practice of initiating women.

PHILOSOPHY

While other groups espouse an open view of religion and magic, the Templars believe in one God, and in the salvation of the Christian Church. Indeed, they see themselves as the strong right arm of the Church, hidden now that the world has turned against the teachings of their faith. Still, the righteous shall prevail; Templars point to the signs of the book of Revelation that the world careens toward an ending, and they must be ready to save the innocent and defend the souls of the virtuous against the forces of Hell that already walk the Earth. Templars have a singular judgment: There are the saved, and there are the damned. When the final trumpet blows, the Templars shall guard the chosen. The weak may inherit the Earth, but only if they survive the depredations of evil. Templars take up warfare and the study of the arcane, perhaps damning themselves, to save the remainder of the world.

FAILINGS

Naturally, the Templar devotion to the Christian Church is unyielding and stern. Even though modern, liberal Templars often epitomize the best qualities of faith, many remain harsh and judgmental, even upholding the reactionary tenets of Old Testament justice. The internal schism between kinder Templars and their older, less forgiving members is a powerful division. More importantly, the Templars find it difficult to recruit members in this age of scientific apathy. Their enemies are many; their resources are limited. Material wealth and faith can go only so far. The strong sword arm tires eventually, but there is no place for rest.

TOOLS AND STYLES

Few Templars pursue "magic" actively, although many are familiar with occultism and arcanology. Those who dabble in calling on the power of Heaven do so through scripture, prayer and sometimes through Church ordeals such as fasting and penitence. Some Templars practice confession to purify themselves. Others continue the knightly vigil of prayer for a night, followed by bathing and ritual ablutions, to prepare themselves to receive the power of God. Miracles and holiness are their hallmarks.

A few Templars retain knowledge of the old crafts and unusual rites of the order. These knights work as armorers or lore-keepers. Some study the techniques of the enemy so that they can be fought. It's not unusual to find a Templar conversant with Kabbalah, Islam, and a little bit of infernalism, who uses his broad knowledge to understand the enemy. The armorers and smiths of the order not only rely on melee weapons and modern firearms, but they also maintain body armor, vehicles, and a little bit of alchemy — most specifically, the secrets of forging Primum.

Specialty Sphere: Forces

Common Foci: Ablutions, fasting, prayer, scourging, Scripture, swords

Concepts: Businessman, diplomat, historian, mercenary, occultist, priest, soldier, weapons master

STEREOTYPES

Tradition Mages: Heretics and heathens all. Their battle for "magic" surely damns them. Let them fall so that the righteous are not tempted.

The Technocracy: Betrayers of decency, they took up the mantle of servitude but in their pride believed that they should become custodians. Their Godless ways will be their undoing. For justice and faith, destroy them and let the miracles of Heaven be known to people once again.

The Lost Crafts: Ever practitioners of heathen ways, bring the Word to them so that they might be saved. The noble savage can be brought into the fold, so seek allies among those who have not been tainted by hatred of our Word.



CHAPTER THREE

SPIRITS AND BYGONES

Although the spirit world is cut off from the mortal realms by both the Gauntlet and the Avatar Storm, spirits and bygone creatures still sometimes make their way to the physical world. Called on most often by mages who truck with such entities, these beings can be powerful allies or nasty foes.

SPIRITS



The nature of spirits remains an enigma to many mages. Some mages assert that spirits are entities that form around specific ideals. Others maintain that spirits are lost souls transformed into something else by their lack of memory. Religiously oriented mages often argue that spirits are divine or profane beings, servants of the cosmos and the Creator(s). Whatever they may be, spirits are diverse beings. Although sometimes incomprehensible to humans and made from ephemera instead of flesh, many spirits enjoy contacting or tormenting mages. There are as many different sorts of spirits as there are possible roles for them, and then some, so most mages tread carefully with them.

Spirits have their own sets of statistics and abilities, for tracking their capabilities.

- Willpower

Willpower allows a spirit to take the following actions: Attack, chase or fly through the Umbra. Contests of this nature between spirits are resolved with opposed Willpower rolls.

Difficulty	Action
3	Easy
5	Fairly simple
6	Normal
8	Difficult
10	Virtually impossible

- Rage

Rage represents a spirit's raw power. Spirits use this Trait to harm each other and physical beings. For each success in a Rage roll (difficulty 6), the spirit inflicts one level of lethal damage on material beings or costs other spirits one Power point.

• Gnosis

Spirits use Gnosis for any sort of Social or Mental roll. A spirit in a riddle contest with a mage would use its Gnosis while the mage's player rolls her Intelligence + Enigmas. Whoever receives the most successes wins. Spirits also use Gnosis when trying to intimidate, seduce or trick someone, either in or out of the Umbra. Social Abilities add to Gnosis if they apply.

• Power

Spirits have reserves of mystical energy called Power, which they harness from the Umbra. They use Power in combat, to power Charms and to survive damage. When Power reaches zero, the spirit dissipates into the Umbra for [20 minus Gnosis] hours. After the time has passed, the spirit re-forms with one Power point. A mage can bind the spirit into a fetish if he has the ability to do so — Spirit 4 — but the fetish will not function until the spirit's Power has recharged fully. Most spirits dislike being enslaved in this fashion; it's a great way to earn their enmity.

Spirits who deplete their Power look translucent. When it loses Power to combat, the spirit begins to look ragged, worn and frayed around the edges. A spirit enters a state called Slumber to recharge Power, preferably after finding a safe location. In Slumber, the spirit floats in a deep sleep. For each hour of Slumber it takes, the spirit regains one Power point. While in this state, a spirit may be bound easily with Spirit magic, regardless of its Power or willingness. Spirits bound into a fetish remain in Slumber until released; the user activates the fetish's power, not the spirit. A newly created fetish needs to recharge fully before use, which can take a long time for powerful spirits.

TASKS

• Movement

All spirits can fly or hover in the Umbra. Maximum movement per turn in the Penumbra is [20 + Willpower] yards. However, distances can warp in the Umbra without warning in relation to the material world.

• Pursuit

A fleeing spirit uses a Willpower roll (difficulty 6), and it begins with three automatic successes if it is in the Umbra. The player of a pursuing mage rolls Dexterity + Cosmology (if using Spirit to enter the Umbra) or Willpower (if using Mind). The difficulty is 8 in either case, because mages aren't native to the Umbra. If a spirit gains a 10-success lead, it escapes. A spirit with the **Re-form** Charm can use it to escape without a roll.

• Communications

Spirits speak different languages than physical beings. Communication among spirits is not so much a language as it is mutual comprehension among all parties. Not all mages can understand spirits. The Spirit 2 Effect **Call Spirits** is required to communicate with them, unless they speak familiar human languages.

CHARMS

Every spirit has special powers called Charms. These powers require a certain amount of Power to use. Unless otherwise specified, each Charm lasts for one scene, and combat-related Charms last for one turn per use. Charms do not invoke Paradox.

• **Airt Sense:** Most spirits have a natural sense of the spirit world's airts (directions), and they can travel without much difficulty. Simple navigation costs nothing; locating a specific object or person in the Umbra costs one Power.

• **Appear:** A spirit with this Charm can show itself to an Earthly observer without taking material form. While manifest in this manner, the spirit cannot affect (or be affected by) the physical world or the Umbra in any way. Demons often use this power to taunt their victims. Using it costs 10 Power, due to the great difficulty in crossing the Gauntlet.

• **Armor:** A spirit can use this Charm to gain one soak die versus lethal and bashing damage per Power point spent. Without this power, immaterial spirits may not soak damage. A spirit may use this Charm at any point in a combat turn before the attacker rolls damage.

• **Blast:** The spirit can project damaging energy at opponents. This Charm costs one Power per bashing damage die, two per lethal die and five per aggravated die. The blast can take any form appropriate to the spirit. For instance, fire elementals project fire, weather spirits project lightning, and Banes cause the target to decay.

• **Blighted Touch:** A spirit can use this Charm to bring out the worst in its target. If the spirit attacks successfully, the victim must make a Willpower roll immediately (difficulty is the spirit's Rage). If he fails, his character's negative personality traits dominate for the next few hours. A botch causes the personality disorder to become permanent. This Charm costs two Power points.

• **Call for Aid:** This Charm allows the spirit to call others for assistance. The spirit's player rolls Willpower versus a difficulty based on the likelihood of similar spirits being nearby. (The difficulty is 3 when spirits are within sight, 8 for common spirits within their habitat and 10 for rare spirits or spirits outside their habitat). This Charm costs five Power points.

• **Cleanse the Blight:** This Charm purges spiritual corruption in the vicinity. It costs 10 Power per use.

• **Cling:** The spirit may attach itself to any target. Only successful grappling — reducing the spirit's Power to zero, or forcing the spirit into Slumber — can remove the clinging spirit. To cling, the spirit must attack the target successfully. Once successful, the spirit gains five extra Willpower dice for grappling purposes. This Charm costs one Power per use, but it lasts indefinitely or until the spirit is separated from the victim.

• **Control Electrical Systems:** The spirit can seize control of electrical devices. The spirit uses Gnosis (difficulty



3 to 9,

depending on the system's complexity — 3 to control a light bulb, 9 to control a HIT Mark). Power cost ranges from one to five points.

- **Corruption:** The spirit can whisper a suggestion into the victim's ear for the cost of one Power. The victim is inclined to act out the suggestion, but the player may spend a Willpower point to negate the Charm.

- **Create Fire:** After a successful Gnosis roll, the spirit can create a fire. The difficulty varies (from 3 for small fires to 9 for a conflagration). Power cost varies from one to five points, depending on the fire's size.

- **Create Wind:** This Charm creates wind effects. Power cost varies from one for a light breeze to 20 for a tornado.

- **Death Fertility:** This Charm stimulates the rapid growth of whatever will kill a target, be it disease, infection, parasites or cancer. Doing so requires a Rage roll at a difficulty of the target's Willpower. Every success inflicts a level of lethal damage. This Charm costs five Power points.

- **Disable:** This Charm can paralyze a single target temporarily. The spirit rolls Rage (difficulty is target's Stamina + 3, or Rage if used against another spirit). The Charm costs one point of Power per remaining health level or Power point, with a minimum cost of 10 points.

- **Dream Journey:** The spirit may use this Charm to intrude on a sleeping target's dreams. Nothing the spirit does carries over when the victim awakens, but its actions will hurt, arouse or comfort for as long as the subject slumbers. Despite the vivid nature of such dreams, the sleeper will not necessarily remember the visitation in the morning. Each visitation costs 10 Power, 15 if the spirit wants the subject to remember everything.

- **Ease Pain:** The spirit can ease a material creature's pain for a scene by spending one Power. The Charm soothes even the most terrible wounds (thus negating dice pool penalties from injuries, but movement restrictions remain), but it does not heal anything. When the Charm fades, the spirit may use it again, spending one Power point per hour.

- **Flee:** This Charm gives the spirit an effective 15 Willpower for the purpose of escape. This Charm (which costs two Power points per turn) includes any rolls that give the spirit a chance to avoid the presence of others through peaceful means.

- **Influence:** The spirit may use this Charm to change the target's mood gradually. The spirit need not speak to the victim to use the Charm. This Charm costs three Power points per die of effect; roll the dice against the victim's Willpower.

- **Insight:** Through this Charm, the spirit can gain insight into any one hidden aspect of the target's self. The

Charm costs 10 Power if it's used to gain a specific piece of information; it costs only five if the spirit reaches for the easiest piece of insight.

• **Iron Will:** The spirit can lock its mind on certain goals from which it cannot stray (guard a location, hunt down a target or remain unpossessed). When activated, the spirit receives five extra dice to resist any attempt to sway it from its course. This Charm costs one Power point per hour.

• **Materialize:** A spirit may use this Charm to materialize in the physical world, but doing so can be quite dangerous. The spirit's Gnosis must be at least two points higher than the Gauntlet for the area. When a spirit materializes, it must spend Power to create a physical shape and give itself Physical Attributes, but the spirit still uses Gnosis for Social and Mental Attributes. The Power cost is five points (Paradox Spirits do not pay this cost) plus the following:

Power Cost Trait

- 1 Per one Physical Attribute level
- 1 Per two Ability levels
- 1 Seven health levels (as a mortal)
- 1 Per additional health level (each extra health level also increases size)
- 1 Per health level healed (regenerate damage to physical form), three points per level of aggravated damage healed. Spirits take aggravated damage from Spirit magic and Paradox explosions
- 1 Weaponry: Per die of aggravated damage above and beyond Strength (Bite or Claws are one additional die, large talons are two, etc.)

Spirits have no limit to Attribute or Ability purchases beyond available Power. It is possible for them to form extremely strong or fast bodies if they spend enough Power points. Most have a "prime form" to which they default when materialized.

Aside from the listed restriction, a spirit can remain materialized for as long as it desires, provided it does not enter an area with a Gauntlet higher than [its Gnosis minus two]. While materialized, the spirit may not recharge Power unless it has a Charm that allows it to do so. When a materialized spirit is attacked, damage applies to its health levels. If its health levels fall below zero, the spirit loses five Power points and dissipates into the Umbra. It may not re-materialize for [20 minus Gnosis] hours.

Note that aggravated damage inflicted on a spirit applies to both health levels and Power.

• **Mind Speech:** A spirit can use this Charm to speak directly into a subject's mind, like the Mind 3 Telepathy rote. Doing so costs three Power points per die.

• **Possession:** Demons and Banes most often possess this Charm. It allows the spirit to possess a living being or inanimate object. To use this Charm, the spirit's player must make a Gnosis roll (difficulty equal to victim's Willpower, or the Gauntlet rating if attempting to possess an inanimate object). The number of successes equals the speed with which possession occurs.

Successes	Time Taken
1	six hours
2	three hours
3	one hour
4	15 minutes
5	five minutes
6+	instantaneous

Until the possession is complete, the spirit will find a dark, isolated part of the Umbra and remain there, concentrating on the Charm. The spirit may take no other action during this time. If it engages in spirit combat, for example, the possessive link breaks. Other spirits usually guard the possessor to ensure that the process is undisturbed. Possession costs 10 Power points.

• **Quake:** The spirit can cause the earth to shake in the area that corresponds to its current Penumbral location. The Power cost is five per one-mile radius. In addition, the spirit can increase the quake's intensity by increasing the power per mile expenditure.

• **Re-form:** This Charm allows the spirit to dissipate and re-form elsewhere in the Umbra, usually far away from enemies. Using **Re-form** costs 20 Power.

• **Shapeshift:** The spirit may take any form it desires. It does not gain any powers or abilities unique to the new shape, only the form and visage. Using **Shapeshift** costs five Power.

• **Short Out:** The spirit can short out electrical systems (Gnosis; difficulty 6) by spending three Power points.

• **Solidify Reality:** Only Stasis-aligned spirits possess this Charm. It enables the spirit to spin a pattern web, thus reinforcing the laws and rules of static reality. This power requires a Willpower roll. With enough successes, the spirit could create a spiritual wall so solid that it's simply impassable to any means. The difficulty is based on the extent and complexity of the solidification and how interesting, sensible and clever the description of the action is. The number of successes determines how much the spirit can solidify. Power cost ranges from one to 20, depending on the magnitude of the feat.

Success makes the object or spirit more solid. An object's effective "health levels" increase by one per success. The effect lasts for a day. Each spirit can make only one roll per object.

• **Spirit Away:** The dreaded power of Paradox spirits and demons. With this Charm, a spirit may snatch a human from the material world and take her straight to an Umbral Realm. If the spirit's player scores four or more successes with a Willpower roll (difficulty 7), the mortal passes through the Gauntlet and into the spirit's personal Realm. He does not pass "Go" or collect \$200; he goes directly to Hell (or wherever). He may try to escape, if he can.... This Charm costs 25 Power, and the spirit must travel with the target.

• **Track:** The spirit may track its prey down unerringly for five Power.

• **Umbral Storm:** The spirit can cause a great downpour in the surrounding Umbra. Due to the Umbra's strange nature, water is not the only substance that might fall from the sky. It costs five Power to create a storm one mile in diameter, with 40 m.p.h. winds. The spirit may increase the storm's size by 10 percent (or the wind speed by 10 miles per hour) for two additional Power points. Storms created in this manner last until they abate naturally.

PRECEPTOR: THE TRICKSTER

Willpower 5, Rage 4, Gnosis 6, Power 40

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Blighted Touch, Corruption, Flee, Insight, Materialize, Re-form, Shapeshift

Materialized Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Social and Mental equal to Gnosis

Abilities: Academics 4, Alertness 3, Cosmology 4, Dodge 3, Enigmas 4, Etiquette 4, Occult 4, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 6

Materialized Health Levels: 7

Image: The Trickster appears to each viewer as whomever that person trusts most. He can choose to manifest a singular appearance when necessary. In such instances, he appears as a devastatingly handsome young man with a winning smile and boyish charm. He prefers to speak in riddles, saying nothing directly.

The Trickster serves Dynamism directly, and he does what he can to break the Technocracy's hold over the world. To such ends, he might disrupt a Technocracy operation somewhere and lead a cabal of Tradition mages to take care of it (not caring to inform them of his intended plan). Unfortunately, most mages aren't prepared for the surprises the Trickster leads them into, but he helps when he can.

His riddles, once deciphered, often reveal information of value to the cabal, be they hints about the future, the resolution of a past problem or an enemy's greatest secret. Unfortunately, the Trickster can't make anything easy, so the mages have to work hard for every step.

NATURAE: ANCIENT TREE SPIRIT

Willpower 8, Rage 4, Gnosis 7, Power 30

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor, Call For Aid (Animal Naturae), Cleanse the Blight, Cling, Iron Will, Mind Speech, Quake, Umbral Storm

Image: A tall tree (100' or more), at least 10' at the base, the tree spirit resembles an ancient, old-growth evergreen. It's found only in the deepest forests, where logging has not yet begun. Mages who see it may be struck by the terrible majesty this force of nature radiates. It is not simply a tree, but the very concept of tree.

The tree can't move on its own, but it often speaks with animal naturae—especially birds—who travel the Umbra's breadth and depth. The tree learns many things from these naturae. The tree has existed in its spot for many centuries, and it has borne witness to or heard tales of nearly everything of importance in the Umbra (not to mention a few matters of Earthly import). Mages might seek such a spirit out for advice or information, but it never gives anything away cheaply. In exchange for such a favor, the tree might require the mages to do something to its benefit, such as stopping a logging company from cutting down its forest or helping other spirits against a terrible Bane that's terrorizing them. Despite its immobility, the tree is certainly capable of self-defense, with the Charms of Quake and Umbral Storm. Incautious mages may find themselves assaulted by earth and sky, as hordes of animal spirits swarm over them. It's best not to antagonize the tree.

ELEMENTAL: FLIGHTY WIND SPIRIT

Willpower 3, Rage 7, Gnosis 5, Power 25

Charms: Airt Sense, Blast (Wind), Create Wind, Flee, Re-form, Spirit Away, Track

Image: The wind elemental appears as a swirling, hyperactive mist. It has a difficult time paying attention to any one task for long. Preferentially, it flies through the Penumbra as fast as possible, raising a general ruckus.

It's possible to convince a wind spirit to aid in some task or other, but doing so is difficult due to its short attention span. With the help of Spirit 4, a mage can bring a wind spirit into the material world, where it can raise all kinds of chaos among his enemies. He should be careful to point the spirit in the proper direction beforehand, or it might decide to "play" with its new friend.

Wind spirits are not childlike, despite the given description. They are chaotic, elemental forces and can be quite destructive if given the chance.

The spirit will occasionally take people out of the material world, usually to the Legendary Realm (a Realm where myths and stories are real). It usually does so in the midst of a tornado or hurricane.

PARADOX SPIRIT: JUDGEMENT

Willpower 6, Rage 6, Gnosis 6, Power 75

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor, Blast (appears as a pistol or other appropriate weapon), Call For Aid (summons more Paradox spirits for backup), Disable, Iron Will, Materialize, Shapeshift (only when changing roles), Solidify Reality, Spirit Away, Track

Materialized Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Mental/ Social same as Gnosis

Abilities: Alertness 4, Awareness 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Drive 3, Firearms 3, Intimidation 4, Investigation 4, Law 4, Streetwise 4

Materialized Health Levels: 8

Image: Judgement appears as an authority figure appropriate to whichever part of the world it's in and the mage who caused its appearance.

Judgement manifests to mages who incur backlashes while flinging around careless magic that would harm Sleepers. Once manifest, it assumes the identity of a law-enforcement officer and attempts to arrest the offending mage. Its Charms manifest as coincidental Effects. Disable appears as handcuffs or some other binding, and Spirit Away appears to be an appropriate vehicle, for example.

Once it has spirited the mage away to its Realm, it puts the mage in a jail cell — again, appearances are what's appropriate to the mage. Within 24 hours, the mage faces arraignment for her crimes and must defend her actions to a heartless, merciless, judge — who is, of course, Judgement. If she cannot defend her actions adequately, Judgement will lock her away for a very long time. Escape occurs at the Storyteller's option — make it difficult.

Judgement has six dice of countermagic at all times. Mages in its Realm suffer an additional three dice of ambient countermagic against all Effects.

It's important, when using Judgement, to be as subtle as possible. The mage should realize that something unusual is up, but not necessarily what that something is. The character (and hopefully the player) should be creeped out.

PARADOX SPIRIT: WHISPER

Willpower 8, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Power 50

Charms: Airt Sense, Corruption, Insight, Iron Will, Mind Speech, Possession (a unique form), Re-form, Track

Image: Whisper has no true appearance. Its spiritual form is a twisting mass of constantly shifting features.

Whisper bedevils any mage who uses too much vulgar magic or accumulates loads of Paradox. It follows the mage everywhere he goes and possesses individuals around him, using the hosts to annoy or distract the mage, or even raise a lynch mob against him (if appropriate). Most often, Whisper prefers to establish raging paranoia. It possesses suspicious types and follows the mage around at a *nearly* discreet distance, abandoning the vessel when or if the mage confronts

it, selecting another a few minutes, hours or even days later. Sometimes it will stop the mage somewhere and whisper an enigmatic — but ominous — warning related to the mage's carelessness with vulgar Effects.

If Whisper wants to be particularly blatant, it will jump from person to person, delivering a message one line at a time, one host at a time and then depart for a little while. The best way to get rid of Whisper is to stop using vulgar Effects for a full month. Otherwise, it continues to pester the mage. Like Judgement, Whisper receives six dice of countermagic against all magical effects, and it may not be bound into a fetish.

Whisper's version of Possession only works on humans. As per the standard Charm, Whisper must roll Gnosis against difficulty equal to the target's Willpower. Rather than wait for extended periods of time, Whisper may add successes to its total by spending two Power points per success. Whisper must score at least one success to spend Power in this manner, and it may only double the total. Each additional possession attempt during a single scene only costs five Power, but each additional success still costs two Power.

MINION: THE BLACK DEMETER

Willpower 6, Rage 7, Gnosis 6, Power 40

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Blighted Touch, Corruption, Deathly Fertility, Influence, Mind-Speech, Sacrifice, Translocation

Image: The Black Demeter's incarnations appear as Middle-Eastern women wearing simple, black robes. Her worshippers often provide her with an elevated chair where she sits and offers demented prophecies. Her Appear Charm is permanent — she's trapped in the Gauntlet, unable to move under her own power.

The Black Demeter was originally a powerful, ancient Incarna (demi-goddess). Millennia of neglect led to a great loss of power. To make things even worse, a small Cabal of Verbena summoned her to Earth shortly before the disaster that shredded the Gauntlet and left it with a new layer of Avatar shards. The Black Demeter's attempt to cross the Gauntlet was disrupted, and the Incarna shattered into eight weaker Avatars. The shattering broke her mind, leaving her an insane, pitiful remnant of what she once was. The Avatars are in permanent telepathic contact with each other, and they often become confused as to which Avatar sees what. The dissonance between her various locations has broken her mind even further. She exists now to attract worshippers who will do her bidding. She seeks to resolve the dissonance by making each of her locations as much alike as possible. One side effect of this desire is her ability to move objects from one of her havens to another [simply by expending five Power points]. If she translocates a living being, roll her Rage (difficulty equal to the target's Willpower). One success allows her to move the object or being to one of her other locations. Each additional success inflicts one level of unsoakable bashing damage.

Since she cannot Slumber to regain Power, she must regain it through sacrifice. She has her followers bring her humans so she can feed on their life force: Each human so sacrificed fully restores her Power pool (for that one Avatar).

RAXNALEDA, KRAKEN OF THE DEEP

Willpower 8, Rage 8, Gnosis 8, Power 60

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor, Blast (Corrosive Poison), Call for Aid (other Banes), Cling, Disable, Dream Journey, Iron Will, Materialize, Mind Speech, Quake, Re-form, Track, Umbral Storm

Materialized Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6, Social and Mental Attributes equal to Gnosis.

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 6, Cosmology 2, Dodge 4, Melee (lifeboats) 4, Intimidation 5, Survival 2

Materialized Health Levels: 10

Notes: Tentacles inflict Strength +3 Aggravated damage.

Image: Raxnaleda manifests as a gigantic (40') squid with far too many tentacles, each with razor-edged flanges.

Raxnaleda is a Bane that attacks underwater explorers whenever possible, and it is the cause of much of the Void Engineers' difficulties in establishing underwater habitats. The Void Engineers have hunted Raxnaleda and its vicious brood of underwater Banes for over a decade now with little result.

Raxnaleda's preferred tactic is to stalk a seagoing vessel for several days, visiting terrifying dreams on the crew to erode morale. Occasionally, it will appear briefly to personnel unwise enough to look outside. Once it tunes the fear to a fever pitch, it attacks. Raxnaleda will not destroy the vessel on the first attack. A few ferocious attacks punctuated by an hour or two of silence, followed up by further attack, makes the victory all the sweeter.

Raxnaleda has brought death and misery to many who dared to cross the Pacific. In recent times, it has stopped attacking surface shipping and focused entirely on underwater explor-

ers. Raxnaleda wasn't always a Bane. Fifteen years ago, it attacked and sank a nuclear submarine, and the radiation from its reactor (combined with other pollutants dropped into Raxnaleda's natural habitat) has combined to make it the much more dangerous and powerful Bane that it is today.

DEITIΩNIC TENTPIPER: RA'T'LAHTI, THE WALKER IN SHADOW

Willpower 6, Rage 6, Gnosis 6, Power 40

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Blast (Flame), Corruption, Create Fires, Influence, Insight, Materialize, Possession, Spirit Away, Tracking

Materialized Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Cosmology 4, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 4, Occult 3, Subterfuge 5

Materialized Health Levels: 8

Image: Ra't'lahti appears to his worshippers as a somewhat hirsute man in a finely tailored black business suit. His eyes flicker strangely in dim light, and his perversely pleasant-sounding voice sets most people on edge.

Like all demons, Ra't'lahti must feed on human souls to survive on Earth. To this end, he's gathered a small cult around himself, and he harvests them slowly as they outlive their usefulness. Ra't'lahti would love nothing better than to snare a mage or two into his group. From there, his power would skyrocket.

To avoid banishment, Ra't'lahti has instructed his worshippers to perform a summoning ritual every dark and full moon. This precaution cuts any unplanned absence to no longer than two weeks.

Ra't'lahti's preferred methods are subtle temptation. He offers his victims whatever they desire, often using **Insight** to ferret out their deepest secrets. He stretches the process out as long as possible, only offering dribs and drabs in exchange for increasingly compromising favors. In time, the target's soul is his, and he may move on to his next victim.

BYGONES



Mythic beasts, or Bygones, are remnants of a lost age. They thrived during the Mythic Ages, but they find the modern age a deadly inconvenience. Very few remain on Earth, surviving in remote places that humans don't visit. Without Quintessence to sustain their magical existence, these monsters literally starve to death within hours. Although other sorts of semi-human creatures manage to survive, perhaps because of their relation to humanity, Bygones cannot last long in this disbelieving modern world.

Marauders sometimes invite or summon Bygones across the Gauntlet for acts of zooterrorism. Such Bygones inevitably fade or die quickly, but they can cause much damage in the meantime.

Only a handful of Bygones still survive on Earth. The remainder move on to other Realms safer for their kind, or they simply wander among the Umbræ. Such Bygones often exist in a demi-spiritual form, not entirely ephemeral, but not composed of material flesh either. To return to Earth, they must have a physical body prepared for them, or have a hole torn in the Gauntlet through which they may pass. Few wish to do so, since the Earthly realm is a barren, lifeless place to them.

Mythic beasts that do choose to cross over need sustenance, or they will die quickly. Few mages can provide the raw Quintessence necessary for sustenance. Bygones may eat Tass, channel raw Prime or even consume a mage's Avatar. Whatever the form, feeding is an absolute necessity. Such thaumivores—which may include familiars—will leave or die if not fed. Even those who do not lack for vitality may suffer if exposed to Sleepers. Bygones are not accustomed to Paradox, and their very presence among Sleepers triggers a reaction similar to that of Effects that are vulgar with witnesses. This resonance is strongest where the population is highest: Very strong in cities, weaker in rural areas and nearly non-existent in the deep wilderness or beyond the Gauntlet (where mythic beasts usually dwell).

The Technocracy hunts and exterminates all Bygones it finds. There is no room in the world for dragons or unicorns. Such monstrosities are too dangerous and, in many cases, too intelligent to be allowed to roam free and compete with humanity. Given their usual habitats, such duties usually fall to the Void Engineers' Border Corps Division. Conversely, Tradition mages view Bygones as endangered species, and they try to move them to safer habitats (i.e., Horizon Realms) where they may thrive.

Mythic beasts have changed slowly over the centuries. Most modern Bygones are indifferent or actively hostile to human life — some prey directly on humans for some of their sustenance (although they cannot meet Quintessence needs in this manner) or simply for the sake of sadism. Bygones of the modern world have become creatures of terror — not wonder.

Bygones range from what seem to be glorified animals all the way to fully sapient, powerful entities with their own agendas and goals (not all of which are beneficial to humanity). Each Bygone is a unique, magical creature with intelligence equal to or greater than any mage's. If mages find a Bygone, it's there for a reason — a very good reason — and it should be dealt with accordingly.

Abominable Snowman

The Abominable Snowman, or "Yeti," usually appears in the Himalayas. It appears to be a tall, furred humanoid of great strength. Most seem peaceful, but they can be quite ferocious when provoked or angered. Sages within the Akashic Brotherhood believe that one or two still survive on Earth.

Grays

Grays are short, gray humanoid creatures with large, black eyes and thin, almost spidery limbs. There may only be a handful, but they travel widely as they seek to abduct and conduct bizarre experiments upon humans. Whether they're the creation of rogue Void Engineers, some bizarre form of Umbrood or servants to Nephandi, none really know, and their goals are equally mysterious.

Jersey Devil

The Jersey Devil lives in the Pine Barrens in New Jersey — a fairly wild place despite the encroaching industry. The creature is described as having "the head of a horse, large wings, claws and a four-foot serpentine body." A Jersey Devil sighting is usually considered an ill omen, a forewarning of imminent disaster. Occasionally, the Devil is believed to be the cause of cattle mutilations, the theft of a shed full of chickens, and bloodcurdling screams in the night.

Chupacabra

The chupacabra, or "goat-sucker," apparently roams across the Mexican countryside, drinking the blood of goats, sheep and chickens. It's reported to be some horrific cross between a bat, lizard and a dog that walks on its hind legs and has fiery red eyes. While reports of chupacabra attacks come only from Mexico, Florida and a few other areas, it's possible that their range extends farther afield. Certainly, mutilated cattle may also be victims of the chupacabra.

Mothman

Over 200 years ago, a Shawnee leader, Chief Cornstalk, was murdered in cold blood. His dying act was to curse the

HOW TO RUN BYGONES

Bygones are rare, unique creatures. Very few should ever actually make an appearance in an Earth-bound game, especially given the new difficulties with crossing the Gauntlet and the increased dominance of the Technocracy's paradigm.

With so few, it's best to assign Traits to the beast as befits the story — using the guidelines for spirits and/or Sendings where appropriate. No Bygone should ever be a "throwaway." Each Bygone should have a very good reason for remaining on Earth and an equally strong purpose in interacting with characters.

For those who want more detail or guidance for creating Bygones, refer to **World of Darkness: The Bygone Bestiary** and **World of Darkness: Blood-Dimmed Tides**. While the latter is quite specific in functionality, it has a host of sea-based denizens with which to populate an undersea Void Engineer chronicle.



murderers, their descendants and their home — what would later be Point Pleasant, West Virginia. In 1966, a West Virginia resident reported seeing the Mothman's glowing eyes. The next day, his dog turned up missing. The next evening, four teenagers saw what appeared to be a six-foot-tall man with folded wings on its back, and two reflective, iridescent eyes. When they tried to leave, it took to the air, following and circling at 100 miles per hour. More sightings followed in the following weeks, and all witnesses reported a near-uncontrollable terror at the sight of the creature. Several dogs were reported missing during the Mothman's activities, while others turned up mutilated. One dog turned up as a charred corpse. Over a year after the first sighting, just before Christmas, the Silver Bridge — crossing the Ohio River — collapsed, sending 46 people to their deaths. Later theories would lay blame on the Mothman, and sightings dropped tremendously after that day. The Technocracy investigated the matter thoroughly and came up empty-handed. The Mothman might still be out there....

Mokole-Mbembe

Since the mid-1800s, accounts of large, quadrupeds with long necks and tails have come out of the Congo. The mokole-mbembe, described by Congo natives as a

river-dwelling creature that comes forth occasionally to eat people, may very well be related to the Apatosaurus, a very large dinosaur. Such accounts hint at other possibilities — what other species of dinosaur survive into the modern era? Could there be representatives in the Amazon? In Southeast Asia? Even the lake monsters, reported from Loch Ness in Scotland to Crater Lake in Oregon, imply a greater variety.

Huldrefolk

The huldrefolk are ancient creatures that may have survived into the modern times underground. In times past, they had farms and fishing villages — often invisible, but the occasional human stumbled across their dwellings. Huldrefolk are short, usually dressed in plain blue or gray. A few (usually female) are quite attractive by human terms, and sometimes they seek to draw men into their embrace — and powerful charms. Despite their humanlike appearance, their backs are hollow. The huldrefolk used to take humans below ground, into their homes, and it seems that such activity is necessary for them to continue in modern times. The huldrefolk rarely allow captive humans to return to the surface. Legend claims that the huldrefolk are descended from children Eve hid away from God. When God discovered the deception, he proclaimed that those not in his sight should remain out of his sight for all time.



TOT

CHAPTER FOUR: WONDERS



Charms and Gadgets, Talismans and Devices, Relics, Trinkets and Treasures, Amulets and Gizmos, Tokens and Favors — such things are items that carry a measure of their own power. Unlike foci, such items can and do hold magical power and the capacity to perform magical Effects that a mage might not be able to duplicate otherwise. Some are mere toys; others are legendary objects for which entire Chantries wage war. They're not hard to find if you know where to look. That well-loved teddy bear handed down for generations, the potent rune-carved staff and the hand-built computer that goes just a little bit faster than top-of-the line are all Wonders with powers of their own.

Wonders come in many shapes, sizes and categories. Some have power that's been impressed on them through centuries of use or belief. Others are invested with power by mages or inhabited by spirits. Mages have many different classes for such Wonders, depending on their exact capabilities. By far, the most commonly held examples are Talismans, objects that have a measure of their own magical energy and powers. Still, some Wonders are just simple batteries of Quintessence while others are semi-sentient or possessed of powers no mage can match. The variety is truly wondrous.

All Wonders have a specific "point rating" that can be used to determine their relative power level and their cost as a Background item. Each type of Wonder has a different way of calculating its value, but the Storyteller may always override it and choose to assign a value arbitrarily. After all, what's a powerful Wonder in one chronicle may be useless in another, and vice versa.

ARTIFACTS AND INVENTIONS

An Artifact or Invention is an apparently ordinary object empowered with some extraordinary ability. Flying carpets, laser cannons, cloaks of invisibility and powered armor suits are all examples of Artifacts and Inventions. An Artifact or Invention's magic is not limited to a preset number of uses. Artifacts and Inventions may be used time and again, their power limited only by the power and understanding of the mage or scientist who wields them.

An Artifact or Invention typically has one or two powers that are either continuous or able to be activated at need. For instance, a suit of powered armor would give its wearer a constant bonus to Strength, while a cloak of invisibility might only render the wearer invisible upon command. Furthermore, an Artifact or Invention can also be a Talisman. In such a case, it has its own Quintessence

and Arete, and the user can rely on the item's natural power instead of activating it with his own knowledge.

Artifacts and Inventions also occasionally have drawbacks, strange little curses or odd limitations on their power. A Storyteller may increase the overall power of an Artifact by adding Flaws to balance the item's power, or afflicting the item with specific negative Resonance or annoying quirks. Some Artifacts are unreliable and they don't always work the way the user wants. Others are downright jinxed, causing all manner of problems. Unfortunately, most such items bear a curse that prevents the owner from ditching them.

As with potion-a-holics, charm-bracelet addicts and Inspector Gadget wannabes, Storytellers may wish to assess penalties for characters who sleep in their powered armor suits or never remove their Rings of Invulnerability. He may dictate that the suit has become grafted to the character's flesh permanently or that the jewelry junkie has become addicted to her precious ring. Perhaps the wearer becomes the slave or cat's paw of the mage (or other entity) who empowered the Artifact, especially if the item is also a Talisman. After all, Artifacts are the greatest creations of the mages and other beings who create them. As such, they Resonate with the power of that being's Avatar and personality, and those who use them cannot help but be affected when they do so.

An Artifact or Invention's value is equal to the Sphere rating of each of its powers. The price doubles if the Effects remain active continuously. Therefore, if an Artifact has a continuous Forces 2 power and a normal Matter 3 power, its total rating is (2 x 2, plus 3) seven points. Continuous Effects are always on, or they can be turned on and off at the whim of the user. Standard Effects are built in, but they can be activated by only an enlightened user — in effect, giving a mage access to a power that she normally wouldn't have.

CRAFTING ARTIFACTS AND INVENTIONS

Artifacts and Inventions may be created with Prime 3 if the mage uses Tass of appropriate Resonance, Prime 4 with regular Quintessence or Prime 5 in the case of making a living Artifact. (A mage may use Prime 4 to create a living Artifact if he uses the right sort of Tass.) The mages working the enchantment must perform an extended ritual, and the players must score total successes equal to twice the value of the Artifact. An equal quantity of Quintessence must be invested as well. Naturally, this undertaking is extremely difficult. Making even a simple item can require a great outlay of time and Quintessence, since the Effect must be rendered more or less permanent, which could require greater success at the Storyteller's discretion. As with any sort of Wonder-creation, making an Artifact or Invention is a heroic undertaking. These quests are excellent stories for mages who want to search out special components, ritual formulae and resonant Tass in the pursuit of the creation of an item of ultimate craftsmanship.

Some sorts of pseudo-Artifacts, such as silk shirts with the strength of steel, can be created solely with Pattern magic. Such enchantments actually rework the Pattern itself into a new form, though, instead of leaving a magical enchantment bound to the item's Pattern. A creation of that sort can functionally be considered an Artifact, but the magic can only be undone by reversing the Effect.

CHARMS AND GADGETS

Charms (or Gadgets to the Technocracy and Sons of Ether) are single-use Wonders such as potions, magic candles, vanishing powder, holy water, miracle formulas, magic bullets, sacramental wine, tins of flying salve, sheets of "really good" acid, strings of firecrackers, disposable Kirlian photography cameras and so on. Unlike Talismans, which can have an array of mystical Effects, Charms are usually created for a single purpose. Occasionally, there are Charms and Gadgets with an array of uses ("Cleans teeth and freshens breath!" "It's a floor wax! It's a dessert topping!"), but their powers generally come under a single umbrella if one looks hard enough. For example, while true holy water is useful both for dissolving vampires and banishing demons, its main use is to wash away sin, explaining why both the Damned and the Damnable find it so unpleasant.

A Charm or Gadget's physical substance is generally used up when its magic is released. These throwaway items can possess mighty Effects, but they disappear eventually. At best, they become mere mementos, non-magical husks of their former power. For example, while a magic mirror that was created as a Talisman would always be magical, a Charm mirror would only work for a set number of times before its magic gave out — possibly with some dramatic effect like the glass shattering once the last magic was done. Such items cannot be recharged as with Talismans, although their physical remnants might be used in the crafting of another Charm, recycled as parts for a new Gadget or charmed again, depending on the circumstances.

Charms are good for only a set number of uses or amount of time before their power gives out, but unlike Talismans, they may sometimes be more useful thus. For example, a bottle may have only five magic pills left, but those pills could be divided between the members of a group. Likewise, a magic candle might be good for two hours, but by chopping it in two, you could get two one-hour candles. Not all Charms and Gadgets are divisible this way — some, like disposable cameras, lose their power when broken, while others, such as individual pills, don't have sufficient magic to share — but most come in sets of charges that can be used as needed. For particularly difficult feats, or in adverse conditions, Charms may also be "beefed up" by increasing the number of charges used at a time.

What constitutes a charge or dose and the amount of time for which it's good is a matter of Storyteller arbitration. One hit of acid or frame of a strip of film is obviously one

charge, though with items such as candles, it's a judgement call, based on the item's power and the desired Effect. A candle whose light reveals the presence of ghosts and spirits might be good for five-minutes per charge (one candle obviously consisting of multiple charges), while flying salve, to be classic, needs to last long enough to get you where you're going. Generally speaking, each charge will last a scene, whether it's five minutes of non-stop combat or two hours of leisurely chatting over coffee. After all, as even the Technocracy agrees, an active metabolism processes drugs more quickly. Multiple doses or charges may also be required for particularly difficult feats. One candle would be all that is necessary to see ghosts in a deserted graveyard on a moonless night, but it would take an entire candelabra to make them show themselves at midday in a downtown department store. Logical metaphysics should always apply.

Unlike Talismans, Charms may also be used by the uninitiated, as long as the user believes in the paradigm of the mage who crafted the Wonder. For example, any Verbena consor or acolyte could use flying salve, as could a superstitious villager who truly accepted the Verbena paradigm, but the goo would be nothing more than herbal ointment to most Sleepers or even an Awakened Technomancer. However, most Technocratic Gadgets can be operated by all but the most sheltered native or willfully ignorant sorcerer. If you believe in them, then they work "like a charm."

Charms are valuable according to their one-shot power. If a Charm duplicates a particular Effect or Merit, then its value is one-tenth the Sphere rating or Merit cost. Therefore, it is best to buy Charms in groups (like a box of candles, a bunch of flowers or whatnot).

CRAFTING CHARMS AND GADGETS

One builds a Charm or Gadget just like an Artifact or Invention, but because it is not permanently empowered, doing so requires one less level of Prime Sphere skill. With the right Tass, apprentices can forge Charms with Prime 2, so these items are key stepping stones in the creation of more powerful magical Wonders.

FETISHES

Used primarily by the Dreamspeakers but also built by members of most Traditions, fetishes are items empowered by an inhabiting spirit. Instead of casting permanent or temporary spells over an object, the mage awakens its slumbering spirit or even cajoles another spirit into taking up residence in the object. Some bellicose mages bind spirits and force them into objects, but doing so often has dire consequences. Spirits do not care to be treated so cavalierly, and they often serve greater entities that may punish the offending mage.

A fetish's powers vary according to the sort of spirit bound into the object. Typically, the mage must make some

sort of deal with the spirit in order to entice it into working as a fetish. A spirit of War, for instance, might demand that the mage kill specific enemies, before it will empower an object so that it inflicts supernatural injury. A spirit of Water could require that the mage cleanse an area of pollution before it will allow itself to be used to make an object that calls down rain. Spirits are as varied in their portfolios as there are forces of nature, but they all operate under certain restrictions. Typically, a spirit can only perform tasks—and, often, only understand concepts—within its area of concern. Furthermore, spirits require some sort of sacrifice or service, called chimirage, on behalf of the summoning mage before they make a deal. Even then, many capricious spirits do not always uphold the letter of the agreement. Spirits bound with magic against their will are even more irate and troublesome, and they often manifest as cursed fetishes.

Because a fetish relies on the powers of a spirit—a part of the Tellurian—it generates no Paradox. However, the spirits within have their own limits of Power that can be exhausted. Furthermore, many fetishes function only under certain conditions agreed on by the spirit, and the spirit may flee the object or fail to function if those terms are violated.

A fetish's cost depends on the power of the spirit itself. Some rare fetishes have multiple spirits bound into them, and they can access all of their powers. The cost can be lowered if the spirit is not required to use all of its powers, or if the mage agrees to specific conditions under which the spirit need not work.

CREATING A FETISH

Making a fetish is not so much an act of objective enchantment as a process of diplomacy. The mage must somehow contact an appropriate spirit, then convince the spirit to listen to his pleas and serve him. Spirits are often wary of performing favors for mages, especially long-term ones like fetish bindings. To offset this reluctance, the mage must sweeten the deal for the spirit, perhaps by offering it Tass, performing onerous duties or undertaking quests to promote the spirit's interests. Often, just establishing contact requires that the mage take up elaborate purification rituals before the spirit will deign to talk to him!

Once the mage has contacted the spirit and gotten it to listen—either with Spirit magic or by visiting the Umbra—he needs to accept the spirit's terms. Of course, the spirit must be favorably disposed to the mage in the first place (often requiring a Charisma or Manipulation + Cosmology or Etiquette roll). Once the mage finds a friendly spirit, the Storyteller determines what the spirit wants and how the mage can do it. Once the mage has complied with the spirit's wishes, the spirit will enter the object and fulfill the terms of its contract, empowering the fetish.

A mage can also use an appropriate level of Spirit magic to bind a spirit into an item, but the compulsion lasts only as long as the enchantment itself. Casting such

an enchantment makes for a surly and hostile spirit, and the item may be quirky or prone to malfunction. Worse still, the mage may find himself the subject of attention of the spirit's cosmological superiors. Woe betide the mage who commands more power than he can control!

FETISHES AND SHIFTERS

The Changing Breeds, the various shapeshifters of the world, also create fetishes. They make pacts with various spirits and form enchanted items just as mages do, but with a few important differences.

A shifter creates a fetish under the terms of an ancient pact with the spirits. As a result, the spirits are more favorably disposed to shifters, and they tend to create longer-term alliances. Furthermore, shifter-created fetishes rarely exhibit drawbacks, quirks or other flaws.

A mage can't use a shifter's fetishes except by commanding it with Spirit magic. Since the mage isn't covered by the shifter pact (even if the mage is related to shifters), the shifter fetish's terms of service don't apply to the mage. Conversely, any shifter that can speak to a mage-created fetish can activate and use the device. Such is the nature of ancient spirit pacts!

PERIAPTS

In the classic sense, Periaps are pearls of power and jewels of might. To modern New Age mages, they're psychic crystals. To the Technocracy, they're power Matrixes and Quintessential batteries.

All these viewpoints are correct, albeit limited in their perspective. Both magical Periaps and technomagical Matrixes store Quintessential power. However, as with Tass, Periaps and Matrixes have a Resonance. This Resonance derives from the fact that Periaps are, in fact, sublimated Tass. With 10 pawns of Tass of the same given type — for example, 10 pints of vampire blood or 10 werewolf claws — a Master of Matter can craft, for example, a "bloodstone tear" or a "moonstone crescent," which has the same Resonance as the Tass from which it's distilled. A Master of Life could use the same materials to make a living Periapt, or Relic, like a "bloodrose" or a "moonflower" (although such is done less commonly, since those items are less portable). The Periapt then becomes something like reusable Tass. It can store additional Quintessential energy, especially of the appropriate type, and absorb that energy naturally in the right surroundings. Better still, the Periapt's power can be used by a mage who doesn't have the Prime Sphere, just because of its own natural ability to channel the power!

Periaps hold small amounts of Quintessence, just like Tass. Unlike Tass, though, they don't need to be destroyed in order to access the power — they're Tass batteries. When placed in an area filled with Tass of the sort from which the Periapt was made, it may even draw out the Quintessence from the Tass automatically. A bloodstone might very well suck up blood from a bucket overnight, recharging its Tass but bringing the concomitant damaging Resonance. Still, for mages without access to Nodes or enough Prime mastery, Periaps are very utilitarian power sources.

When set into Talismans or Artifacts, a Periapt's Resonance matches to the item it is used to empower. A bloodstone tear from a brutal vampire or a moonstone crescent from an warrior werewolf could be used as the pommel for a magic sword, since they would both be empowered with a warlike Resonance. The same jewels could also be set in the navel of a sorceress or the forehead of her pet toad, usable for all their vicious and warlike magic, although they would become flavored over time with the Resonance of the familiar's spirit and the sorceress's Avatar. Eventually, the Periapt would become part of the creature, so the Periapt's Resonance would match its host, but the host's Resonance would have also slowly changed to reflect the power of the Periapt.

All power, of course, has its inverse, and Quintessence is mirrored by the force of Paradox. Whenever a Periapt or Matrix's Quintessential energy is used to power a vulgar effect, the gem will draw in and store the Paradox generated, colored with the appropriate Resonance. When the Periapt or Matrix is used in the future, this Paradox counts as part of the mage's pool for purposes of Backlash. Periaps and Matrixes used for one too many vulgar Effect become the infamous "cursed gems" and "grid overloads" of so many stories. A powerful Periapt is something every mage would covet, but not when it's filled to the brim with Paradox energies.

Despite the name, Periaps and Matrixes do not have to be small gems or crystals or pretty flowers. A Periapt or Matrix could just as easily be an end table or a chair (or in the classic sense, an altar or a throne) or even a huge plant, like the coven trees of the Verbena. Gems are simply durable and portable, and the same ruby can be used as the eye of your idol, the stone for your Hermetic lodge ring, the tip of your wizard's staff or the laser crystal for your Buck Rogers ray gun. The same can not be said of an end table or 50-foot oak. Then again, altars, thrones and large oak trees are far more difficult to swipe or disguise.

Although agents of the Technocracy assert that they do not use the same props as their mystic counterparts, they do. Thrones are now "Command Chairs" and altars are "Powered Workstations," and they are still set with the same Matrixes as always.

If a Periapt is set into an Artifact or Talisman (or Invention or Device), the gem's power may be used to fuel the Wonder's Effects. Consequently, jewels for rings, crowns, necklaces, the tips of wands, the hilts of daggers and so on are quite popular as Periaps. However, while they can be swapped out like batteries, you also need to have the right type. Sticking a demon's soulgem into a wand of healing is bound to have evil results.

Each point of a Periapt's power represents five points of Quintessence. To access this power, the mage's player must make a Wits + Meditation roll or use the Prime Sphere as if drawing upon Tass. If the Periapt is actually set into the mage in question, then its Quintessence is considered part of the mage's personal Pattern — but so is any of its Paradox.

CRAFTING PERIAPTS

Periaps and Matrixes are forged from pure Tass. Each dot of the Periapt's power requires the use of 10 points of similar Tass, which must be fused together with a Matter 5 ritual (or Life 5, for a living Periapt). The Periapt's natural Resonance could then be used to forge it into some Artifact or Talisman that would be appropriate, or it could simply be kept as a "Quintessence battery" of reusable Tass.

If your mage wishes to set a Periapt or Matrix into his flesh permanently, it must also first be attuned. To attune a Periapt or Matrix, empty it of all power, then roll Charisma + Meditation (difficulty 6) until you achieve successes equal to the Periapt's rating. However, a botch on this roll indicates that the mage can never attune that Periapt, and it may injure the mage, damage the Periapt or destroy it outright.

Note that a Periapt must be created all at once. Thus, Periaps are fairly rare — how often does a modern mage get his hands on 10 or 20 pawns of Tass? — and anything beyond five points (made from 50 Quintessence) is as rare as hen's teeth.

TALISMANS AND DEVICES

Mystic Talismans and Technocratic Devices are infused with part of the essence of a mage or Technomancer, the sacrifice of the very will of one of those who crafted the Wonder. These consummate creations have a magical forcefulness all their own — in game terms, they have an Arete rating. By itself, this Arete does nothing. However, when used as a focus, either as the sacred regalia of a mage's rituals, or the scientific instruments for a technomage's procedures, the mage may use the Talisman or Device's Arete instead of her own. Furthermore, the Talisman may be empowered with additional capabilities like an Artifact, and its own Arete can be used for those tasks. Talismans also store Quintessence much like a Periapt, which they use to empower their Effects.

A Talisman can have any number of powers and Effects, and it often has multiple functions. As a rough estimate, a Talisman's value is computed as equal to its Arete rating. If



the Talisman has any additional powers, they can be added to its cost like an Artifact or Periapt.

(Talismans in previous editions of **Mage** are typically calculated at twice the item's Arete cost. Count this cost as the item's Arete value plus the value for the Talisman's Quintessence storage, which is generally five times the item's Arete, as per a Periapt. Additional Effects may cost more. Talismans aren't cheap, especially in this age of dying magic.)

TALISMAN CREATION

Creating a Talisman requires: Prime 3 with a number of pawns of Tass (of the appropriate Resonance) equal to the desired Talisman rating; or Prime 4 with the same number of points of Quintessence invested by the same mage who grants the point of Willpower; or Prime 5 in the case of creating a living Talisman, unless you have Tass of the appropriate Resonance, in which case the may require only Prime 4. The creation process is generally an extended ritual requiring successes equal to the Talisman's total rating. Prime 3 is used for channeling and funneling Quintessence, infusing an object with existing magical energies, while Prime 4 is used to mold the Quintessential flow of nonliving matter selectively. Talismans made thus actually become vessels for odylic force, and they may not only hold it (as does a familiar or a mage's Avatar) but refill themselves given the right circumstances. In Technocratic terms, Prime 3 takes existing energies and uses them to power a disposable item while Prime 4 creates a rechargeable battery pack for a Device. Prime 5 alters the flow of Prime in living tissue, creating Relics.

The creation of Talismans and Relics is also quite vulgar. To weave a Talisman, a mage enters his Sanctum or workroom, gathers his ingredients, expends a temporary point of Willpower, then begins an extended bit of ritual, the details varying with his paradigm and the task at hand. The player must then make a roll of Intelligence + an appropriate Ability. Simply making the item in question may require a great deal of time and special materials.

At this point, the player begins the long haul, rolling his mage's Arete each hour against the normal Effect difficulty (typically 8 or more, for a Prime 3+ vulgar Effect). For each point of Arete rating of the Effect he wants the item to possess, he must score a success and incorporate a point of Tass with appropriate Resonance into the crafting of the Talisman — not the power from his own Avatar.

Every hour the mage works, his player continues to make Arete rolls until he gets a regular failure — no successes, but not botches either — at which point he can do no more work, and the Talisman is done. If he does botch, the work is ruined, the Tass is wasted, and there may be a spectacular Paradox accident. Consequently, most mages do not craft Talismans for hours on end.

At the end of the creation process, the player cements the creation by making his temporary Willpower expenditure permanent. He ties a small portion of the mage's enlightened will into the object, forever branding it with magical powers. If the mage does not do so, then the object is nothing more than a Charm. Its powers can be used once before it becomes only a hollow shell again.

RELICS

By using Prime 5 to reweave the underlying Pattern of a living being or portion thereof, then investing this Pattern with other spells, a Master of Prime may create a Relic, or living Talisman. Many Masters of Prime, particularly of the Chorus, use this power to imbue their limbs or organs with mystical properties, allowing them to cast common Effects and blessings. The Verbena, not to be outdone, have given birth to children whose bodies are Talismans themselves, and they enchant coven trees with powerful magic of their own. Undying roses, magical songbirds and even Tass-gathering bees have also been produced by this Effect. This Effect can also grant magical blessings to those a Master favors.

RESONANCE OF TALISMANS

Most Talismans are Awakened with some degree of sentience, but even those that have been lulled to sleep through magic or simple lack of use still have very strong Resonance. This Resonance derives from the fact of their making, since a mage who crafts one sacrifices a permanent point of his Willpower to place the enchantment. The Talisman, in fact, is an extension of the will of the mage who created it, and a mage who has made this sacrifice still possesses this Willpower as long as the Talisman is in his possession. For example, if a Hermetic magus were to enchant his signet ring into a Talisman, he would still have access to his lost point of Willpower as long as he wore the ring. If he were to lose the ring, even taking it off to wash his hands, he would lose that portion of his will until he regained it. (This Willpower, however, cannot be spent, being reserved for the Talisman. The mage only possesses it for the purpose of Willpower checks and rolls.) Relics, being a little bit harder to lose, are accounted the same way — if you've enchanted your right index finger into a Wizard's Finger, you're not going to lose the Willpower until you lose the digit, but you won't have that Willpower point free to burn if you need it.

The connection between a mage, or "smith," as the crafters of Talismans are often called, and the tools he creates is very tight. These objects are considered to be at range zero for purposes of the Correspondence Range Chart, and the mage who creates them can locate them almost instantly (or apport them back with Correspondence 2 and the appropriate Pattern Sphere). Likewise, whenever a Talisman's magic is invoked by someone other than the rightful owner, its

maker's player may make a roll of Perception + Awareness to note the usage. He may even use countermagic against this use or open a scrying window if he so chooses. Using Correspondence, smiths may even puppet the Talismans they craft, at least in regards to their magical operation. Using a Correspondence 2/ Forces 2 Effect, a mage may transmit kinetic energy that allows him to wield a sword or wave a wand from around the globe, although Paradox still applies. Particularly grisly tricks may be done with Correspondence 2/ Life 2 and living Relics.

Since Talismans and Relics are such intensely personal creations, they resonate strongly with the personality of the mage who crafted them. Any mage checking for Resonance will recognize the stamp of the item's creator. Moreover, anyone who uses a Talisman will be influenced subtly by the thoughts of the maker and the item's purpose, prompting him to make use of the item in the way it was intended and in a fashion with which the maker would approve. Such is the case even when the mage who made the Talisman or Relic is dead, since the will that created the Wonder lives on in the legacy of his creations. Of course, the creations may take on different personalities after time and successive owners.

For those who wish exact mechanics, consider a Talisman to have the same Nature and Demeanor as its creator, as well as a Willpower rating equal to its Arete. Roll a contest of will whenever a circumstance arises that is either antithetical to its Nature or is in perfect harmony with its Nature and Demeanor. If the owner attempts to use a Talisman in a manner contrary to its Nature (like a virtuous Cavalier's sword hacking up helpless innocents), and the Talisman wins the contest of will, the wielder is forced to stop. If the wielder wins, the Talisman may roll its own Arete against the wielder's use of its power. This contest does nothing to stop the mundane uses of its physical form, however. When a circumstance arises that is in perfect harmony with a Talisman's purpose (like a blessed rosary driving a demon out of a possessed victim), a similar Willpower contest must be made if the Talisman's owner tries to resist the urge. The Technocracy, of course denies that Devices can have personalities, but this disbelief doesn't change the fact that Iteration X's tools will generally only work for someone of a scientific mindset who is similarly cold, calculating and analytical. Of course, some mages (notably Orphans) and other Technomancers (such as the Virtual Adepts) have been able to hotwire them anyway.

Relics are another matter. In the case of portions of the mage's own body, the wills are one, and there's no conflict. However, when a mage grants such power to her progeny (literally giving birth to it in the case of the Verbena), there can arise a question of will versus will. In the case of a witch's daughter, the will of the mage often forces an accommodation in the life of the child. The child may grow up to be a miniature copy of her mother, only realizing after the witch's death the subtle and not-so-subtle influence she

had on her. ("She always knew where I was! And I couldn't use my magic against her if I tried!") However, in the case of magic power granted to an older recipient, while the subject's Willpower is increased, that extra Willpower is not the subject's own, and he may soon come to fear the link and the legacy. Even killing the mage who cast the spell will not purge the foreign will — the only act that will do so is to physically cut off the enchanted portion of one's anatomy. Of course, if the mage and the recipient are harmonious in nature, there may not be any problem — as is usually the case when grafting on some Relic for the sake of sheer power.

SENTIENT TALISMANS AND RELICS

While most Talismans and Relics do not have minds *per se*, some do. For example, the Virtual Adepts commonly install artificial intelligence programs into their laptops computers, and Iteration X cyborgs have similar programs running within their internal computers. Some witches and wizards have Talismans that are also their familiars, like walking sticks and magic mirrors that actually talk to them and give them advice. And, as anyone who's read too many fantasy novels knows, swords can not only sing, but a few of them talk and have decided opinions as to how to approach a battle.

Players who wish for their characters to have a sentient Talisman or Relic should just use the *Mentor* or *Familiar* Background, as appropriate, and define it as a Talisman. (Combining a mentor with a Relic, for example, gives a witch something similar to a familiar, but without the necessity of pacts or Quintessence, and without the advantage of a mental link.)

The most dangerous (and interesting) Talismans and Relics, however, are those that house a human consciousness, especially that of an Awakened mage. Using last-ditch magic, a mage may transfer her consciousness into a Talisman that is able to do various tricks, including possessing a suitable host. Indeed, there are some mages whose "immortality" stems from a sword or ring that passes from one hapless victim to the next.

THE CORRUPTION, SALVATION AND PERVERSION OF THE NATURE OF TALISMANS

A Talisman's Resonance is composed mostly of the mental stamp of the mage who created it. However, most Talismans exist beyond their creators (at least their creator's physical incarnation when he crafted them). As such, they fall into the hands of others, who use, misuse or redeem them.

For example, a Hermetic magus bequeaths his show-stone — a ring set with a large ruby — to his niece on his deathbed, hoping she will follow in his footsteps and that the mighty Talisman will help her to Awaken and guide her thoughts. It does, and she joins the Order, bearing her

uncle's ring. However, she lives a long and eventful life, far more eventful than her solitary uncle. Her experiences color the Resonance just as much as her uncle's, and perhaps more. In fact, she decides that the Talisman is not so mighty as she might like, and she weaves her own spells around it, increasing its Arete and adding additional powers. The next mage to bear the showstone will have an even more powerful Wonder that will have an even greater effect on his life. (If her uncle ever returns in a later incarnation to retrieve his ring, won't he be surprised!)

Likewise, it's a standard tactic for Nephandi to take captured Talismans and place them in the hearts of their Labyrinths, there to let them soak up the Quintessential evil of the place. Not to be outdone, the Celestial Choristers perform elaborate cleansing rites on everything they get. If that method isn't sufficient, they make sure to lock the item up on holy ground, in the wellspring of some blessed Node, until it is "washed clean." (Multiple successes notwithstanding, 100 years of evil is not going to go away after a quick Hail Mary and a dunk in the holy water font.) Besides changing the Nature and Demeanor of a Talisman, such treatment can be used to give one a taste for blood or, for that matter, take it away. To put it bluntly: "Guns don't kill people, people kill people — but some guns *like* killing people, and tell people to pull their triggers. Or even pull their triggers themselves once someone's been so kind as to point them in the right direction." When such is the case, you either lock them up or prescribe therapy, depending on how bad it is.

RECHARGING WONDERS

Most Quintessence-fueled Wonders can be recharged one of two ways. First off, mages can use a Prime 3 Effect to recharge the Quintessential batteries of Wonders by transferring the power out of their own Avatar. Doing so bonds the Wonder very strongly to the mage, since it is now his power that infuses it and fuels it. The Resonance of the mage himself will color that of the Talisman over time until they are "in tune."

One may also recharge Wonders by placing them in a Node with appropriate Resonance and leaving them to soak up the energies. Wonders recharge at a rate of one Quintessence per the rating of the Node per week. This rate assumes that the Talisman is the only one in the Node, of course, and that the Node's power is appropriate to the Talisman. A magic sword could be recharged in a Node tied to War, Honor, or Glory, but one left too long in a Node resonating with Fertility might act a bit... quirky... until such time as the charge was used up. (But then, we all know that swords are phallic symbols, right?)

Technocratic Devices recharge roughly the same way, although in Technocratic terms. In other words, you have a qualified technician (that is, one with Prime 3) spend time tinkering with the Device doing a "tune up," or take the Device back to the lab (the Node) and allow it to recharge.

Paradigm, however, is key. An Iteration X cyborg, even if he wanted to, could not "tune up" a Verbena's cauldron, and likewise a Verbena is not going to be able to recharge her wand just by taking it to the local Son of Ether lab and plugging it into the Tesla coil.

Occasionally mages of opposing paradigms can find common threads — a Progenitor botanist and a Verbena herbalist can make use of the same garden, generally speaking — but for the most part, it's only the Hollowers and Orphans who truly shine in this department. They may use either Technocratic or mystical Nodes and foci. To a Hollower, it's perfectly valid metaphysically to recharge your Tarot cards by placing them atop a computer monitor, as long as the web browser is tuned to "Dark Side of the Web." And if that neat laser gun set into the cyborg's hand stops working the day after you cut it off? Well, why not use necromancy to juice it back up?

BLOODTHIRSTY WONDERS

Often referred to as "wicked" or "evil" Wonders, these magical creations are more properly referred to as "vampiric" or "necromantic." To put it bluntly, life energy is Quintessential Power, and some Wonders can make use of it to refill their reserves. This matter is not one of specific enchantment since it is of form and function and the metaphysical Resonance of the object. Any Wonder can get "a taste for blood" just the same as a Wonder can lose it. This effect is most common with knives and other such instruments commonly bathed in lifeblood, which manage to work their magic at the same time as they recharge their stores of Quintessence (like the legendary "thirsty blades" of Kali). However, many other Talismans — typically those made the Nephandi — may have powers completely unrelated to killing, yet may still be recharged by directly siphoning away Life energies, whether from the user, a victim, or through the direct expedient of killing someone with the object. This last is often prompted by particularly bloodthirsty Wonders using a Prime Effect on the wielder, doing aggravated damage as the Wonder automatically recharges its Quintessence battery unless immediately presented with an alternate source, such as a freshly murdered victim. The Resonance and will of such items also sometimes prompts owners to make use of them. Generally speaking, however, only the extraordinarily weak-willed and homicidally inclined fall prey to these urgings.

For game mechanics, a healthy human body has 10 points of Quintessence, each corresponding to a health level (the last three count beyond Incapacitated). Necromantic Wonders can take whatever a person has left, up to the item's maximum level of Quintessence. A few rare ones — generally only those dealing with "age" and "youth" — instead feed on a person's lifespan, one year per point of Quintessence, shortening the thread of a person's allotted span and diminishing his vitality an equal amount.

The Council of Nine has no official position on the use of such Talismans except to “advise caution.” Individual Traditions, however, have quite vocal thoughts on the matter, ranging from the Celestial Chorus’s stance that such devices are abominations to the more practical position of the Euthanatos that if you’re already going to kill someone, you might as well not waste the power. Reduce, reuse, recycle....

PARADOXICAL TALISMANS AND RELICS

It is an unfortunate commentary on magic and science both that mystic creations and technological prototypes are notoriously buggy. In game terms, this tendency toward going haywire is another name for Paradox. At their option, Storytellers may have certain Talismans “piggybank” the Paradox generated by any user until lashing out with an appropriate Backlash or Paradox Flaw.

For example, the *Corona Nephantus*, or Hell’s Crown, is a magic circlet that is capable of performing various evil Effects best left to the Nephandi to describe. However, any Paradox generated by this item manifests as a specific Paradox Flaw in the shape of Satanic horns. It starts with attractive little black devil horns (3 points), increasing in size with accrued Paradox until they rival those of the character “Darkness” from the movie *Legend* (whose horns are equivalent to a 5 point Paradox flaw). At this point, it becomes impossible to remove the circlet short of chopping off the mage’s head. Most mages stop using the crown (or are forced to stop using it) well before this point, but conceivably the Hell Crown may go on to add cloven hooves and a barbed tail. Such physical abnormalities may even bring status among the Nephandi, but they also cause problems for a mage just walking down the street.

Items that store their Paradox and let it loose in specific Flaws or Backlashes cost the same amount of points as regular Talismans and Relics. It is a Storyteller decision as to the manner in which any particular Talisman deals with Paradox. Some piggybank it, some throw it into the mage’s Paradox pool, some can do either depending on the circumstances.

THE CREATION, ORNAMENTATION AND REPAIR OF TALISMANS AND RELICS

Talismans and Relics are the supreme act of will of a mage. As such, they are not objects to be made frivolously or generically. To be blunt, mages are not shopping marts, and no Master is going to sacrifice a portion of his will and magic to create a toy for some whiny apprentice. After all, a Master needs very few things that apprentices can offer. It’s a rare mage who empowers a Talisman, and most invest no more than one or two in a lifetime.

The items most commonly imbued with Talismanic properties are a mage’s unique foci. The Order of Hermes has an impressive collection of showstones and magic rings,

and such is also the case with some of the cauldrons passed down by Verbena covens. Not only do unique foci already Resonate so strongly with their owner’s beliefs and Avatars that they are that much easier for the mage to enchant (-1 difficulty at Storyteller’s option), but if you’re going tie yourself to some object, it better be something worthwhile.

Mages very often place additional enchantments on already existing Talismans and Relics, or they work in concert on their creation. Once the sacrifice of Willpower has been made, it does not need to be made again, as long as the new mage’s spirit remains in harmony (i.e., he has the same Nature, Demeanor and Essence) as the smith who first crafted the item. The sacrifice must be made again if the mage’s spirit is different (and the Talisman gains a dual nature). In the case of creation in concert — such as the forging of a new cauldron by a full coven or the planting of a World Tree — the sacrifice of Willpower must only be made by one mage. This sacrifice needs not necessarily come from the Master Smith (i.e., the mage who’s casting the Prime Effect), but the Talisman will bear the mark of the mage who does make the sacrifice before all others.

Both unique foci and Talismans can be broken. However, anything that is torn can be mended, that which is broken can be repaired, and even those things that are utterly demolished can be forged anew. For example, an Akashic Brother inherits the great sword of his clan, which is both an Arete 1 Talisman and his unique focus. He progresses to near mastery with his sword and magic until he attempts to cleave the skull of a Technocratic pig in twain. However, he discovers that this particular pig is a *cybernetic* Technocratic pig with a reinforced Primum skull. The great sword of his clan shatters into bits. When this happens (once he escapes from the Technocrat, that is), he has three options. He could try to surpass his focus in his Sphere, he could try to gain enough Arete to declare this Sphere to be one he can use without a focus, or he could undertake a major quest to forge his clan sword anew.

Magically, all that is required for the latter option is the appropriate rote, but metaphysically and storywise, a great deal more is necessary. Storytellers should include quests for special ingredients (for example, the head of the HIT Mark that shattered the sword, to be smelted down and used for alloy) as well as consultations with the spirits and so on. (After all, what do the revered ancestors think of all this?)

For absolute drama, Storytellers may wish to have the repair of a unique focus be the same act as the creation of a new Talisman. The character, in his devotion to bring his prized keepsake back, must actually infuse a portion of his essence into the object such that its magic will live on after his death.

Relics may also be repaired in a similar fashion with powerful Life magic. For example, a mage who enchanted his finger into Wizard’s Finger and then pointed it at one too many werewolves and had it bitten off might just want to get

it back. Of course, retrieving it is one task, reattaching it is another—and if it's been utterly dissolved by lycanthropic stomach acid, just growing it back with Life magic won't do the trick. The mage will need to get back the essence of the Relic, which, unfortunately, has been incorporated into the being of a nasty werewolf, who may begin displaying uncontrolled magical Resonance, depending on the Storyteller's wishes and how much fairytale logic he wishes to follow. Typically, such Resonance doesn't manifest as controllable magical power—just as random strangeness that afflicts the victim, usually in all sorts of uncomfortable ways.

Recovering the essence of such a Relic may be even more important if it is also the mage's unique focus. Lest this property become too abusive (your body is not a unique focus, even if you are a martial-artist), Storytellers should keep such physical unique foci limited to small or fragile portions of anatomy classically tied to magic (such as a magician's hands, the evil eye or Samson's long hair). If they are lost, they are gone for good unless some major magic and epic quest is undertaken to regain them (or, in the case of such things as long hair, they grow back naturally, without a boost from Life magic).

THE UNIMAKING OF TALISMANS

Mages may sometimes regret the creation of a Talisman or Relic. Certainly a magic cigarette lighter may be a nifty toy, but once you give up smoking, it may be less useful than you originally thought. Or perhaps you made a Talisman as a present for a lover who is now dead, and you personally wouldn't look very good in an enchanted string bikini. Or, after the third time of having some Nephandus chop off your hand and run away with it, you're getting a little bit sick of the drill.

At this point, mages may wish to take their will back into themselves and work the charm of Unmaking. This spell is precisely the same one as that of Talisman or Relic creation, but at the end of it, the mage is simply left with a mundane object or body part, a number of pawns of Tass and an additional point of Willpower.

COMPOSITION MAGIC FOR TALISMANS AND UNIQUE FOCI

To protect their Talismans and unique foci from destruction, most mages place protective spells on them. Such magics do not count as Effects for the Talisman or Device. A Time Talisman clock with **Perfect Time** worked on it would not be able to use this Effect on other Devices, for instance. However, if such Effects are permanent, they cost the same price as Effects that the item can work itself. After all, a magic clock that always runs perfectly is better than one with sticky gears.

The Aura Adamantium (Matter 3 or 5)

The Order of Hermes commonly places this spell on its various ritual implements, preventing them from breaking or

deforming in any way. It is generally coincidental ("Whoops! Dropped the crystal ball! Lucky thing it didn't break!"), but it is not insurmountable. The Matter 5 variant alloys the object with Adamantium, the strongest substance known to legend or comic book, and prevents destruction by all but similar extremely magical Effects.

Beads on a String (Correspondence 2, Entropy 2, Matter 2, Mind 2, Spirit 2)

Little is known of the author of this Effect, Poppy Jenkins, other than the fact that she was a flower child in the Haight of the 60s, was either an Orphan or a Cultist of Ecstasy, and she left behind a legacy of one unique Artifact, a string of love beads that was her unique focus for all her magical Effects. When the Technocracy killed her, her string broke, scattering beads in all directions. The magic was gone... or so the Technocracy thought.

The Talisman is now known as the True Love Beads, or the Kismet Strand, and its Effect is as follows: Whenever anyone, Sleeper or mage, finds one of the lost beads, a signal goes out, locating his or her true love and soul mate. One of the other beads finds its way to that person — whether through Correspondence teleportation or Entropy happenstance there is some debate — and the two are subtly compelled to follow the chain down, questing until the necklace is complete and the two are rejoined. The magic of this Effect is enough to prompt spontaneous Awakenings, causing no end of troubles for the Technocracy and even many of the Traditions.

While this Talisman is obviously powerful, many mages have theorized regarding the Effect, since it is simple enough to work. It is similar to a classic (though hard-to-prove) Effect in which a Master enspells a prized Talisman or Relic so that it will make its way to him in his next incarnation, wherever or whenever that may be. Many believe that the spontaneous Awakenings of many Orphans can be traced to this Effect.

Memento Mori (Mind 3, Spirit 3)

With this magic, a mage awakens the spirit of an object, infuses it with the sum of his consciousness, then lulls it back to sleep simultaneously. The object thus becomes a psychic backup copy of his being, and remains quiescent until it is contacted again by the same spirit that placed the impressions. Besides working as insurance against Technocratic brainwashing, it also makes it possible for a mage to remember his past life as a mage (or even for a Sleeper to Awaken spontaneously as he remembers who he was). Combined with **Beads on a String**, Talismans or even simple mementos can wander the Earth until they find the soul to whom they properly belong, then remind that person of who he was. Sometimes, they do so gently (through hints and dreams); sometimes they do so with a sudden barrage of raw memory. Most, however, make their revelations at some speed in between.

The Foundling (Correspondence 2, Life 5, Matter 2, Mind 3, Spirit 4)

This last-ditch enchantment is worked by a Master who is about to die, and occasionally by less enlightened mages who burn away their essence for one last burst of wild magic.

This magic attaches the mage's Avatar to his most prized item as a phylactery, apports it to somewhere else on the globe where there is a couple desperately longing for a child of their own and creates the body of a newborn infant to house his Sleeping spirit. The couple who finds the child and phylactery are then subconsciously influenced to lock the phylactery away "until he's older," then raise the child up as their own. Once the child is "ready to make his way in the world" (in modern times when he's leaving for college), the phylactery is presented, along with the miraculous story. Doing so, along with the **Memento Mori** enchantment, prompts the mage's Awakening and returning memories of his prior life.

Of course, mages being who and what they are, many foundlings jump the gun, finding the phylactery in some locked bureau drawer and Awaken as children.

Fits Like a Glove (Matter 3)

A standby in the Mythic Ages, this enchantment has fallen out of fashion due to its exceeding vulgarity. Cast upon Seven League Boots, magic rings or any similar item, the apparel or ornament immediately resizes itself to fit a new owner. Due to the Paradox this Effect causes in the current age, however, most mages do not use it as an automatic enchantment, but instead as a coincidence. Variants have used Correspondence 5 to warp space, or even Life 4 to make someone "grow to fit the master's shoes," but these variants are even less common.

The Master's Hand (Life 1, Prime 2)

This ancient magic has been reproduced most recently by the Technocracy in the form of retinal scans, fingerprint locks and even DNA passwords. Basically, all that it does is set up a protocol whereby a Device checks a user for authorization before allowing her to have fun with it. Of course, as with most Technocratic Effects, this Effect is just an update of the ancient one whereby a magician ensures the loyalty of his Talismans, the security of the wards on his Sanctum and so on. As with wards, this enchantment may be layered many times such that it is proof against casual unwrapping. It may also be keyed to the Master's spirit or mind (with the substitution of the appropriate Spheres) or broadened to have a large list of "approved users." Note that this Effect only applies to magical functions — an unapproved user might not be able to fire a laser cannon, but she could still hit people with it or steal it. Truly sentient Talismans (very ancient ones, or those with the Mind 5 **Create Mind** Effect on them) may find ways to subvert such locks if they don't suit their purposes.

Inscribe Amulet (Entropy 1, Matter or Life 1, Time 4 other Spheres as needed)

This Effect creates an Amulet (or Gizmo, to the Technocracy), which is to say, a physical object that has some other Effect left as a "hanging spell" with a Sleeping Beauty-style "contingency clause." Such things might include a mirror that becomes an impassable mountain of glass when cast on the ground, or a pair of earrings that becomes a powerful bomb when placed together. Despite the possibilities, such magic is not necessarily vulgar. Mages who inscribe such Amulets, knowing the changing vagaries of time and the inscrutable nature of the future, often create baubles that can work their magic only when reality does not object. Consequently, the Order of Hermes has stockpiles of magical tokens that could be used to summon dragons if such creatures weren't now mythological.

In other words, inscribing amulets will count as vulgar magic with witnesses unless the mage adds in a "reality and current fashion permitting" clause to the trigger. Likewise, Effects considered vulgar without witnesses can be generated with a "not before the eyes of unbelievers" clause. Indeed, the spells on many Amulets resemble complex legal or computer codes filled with if/ then clauses, which, in fact, they are. Mages with Entropy 1/Time 2 can read this magical coding and make sense of it. Virtual Adepts notwithstanding, it's well nigh impossible to crack such codes otherwise.

To change the nature of the magic drastically would require a major feat with Entropy 5 to pervert the intent of the wording — hardly worth it when all the amulet holds is a Matter 2/Prime 2 Effect. To make matters more difficult, many mages who inscribe Amulets use Life instead of Matter — or use both — making it so that the magic works on a bloodline (typically their mortal descendants) or on a family heirloom which will only work for those of the blood. Indeed, it is thought that many unique foci are nothing more than burnt-out amulets that stubborn descendants have believed in long after their magic has been used up, and the spontaneous Awakenings that accompany these bloodlines and heirlooms are the legacy of a dead ancestor's magical gifts.

Except for the manner of their creation, Amulets are virtually indistinguishable from Charms, except that Amulets are not divisible. For example, a candle with a hanging spell cast over it might lose its magic if broken in two, while a candle composed from magical wax could be cut into two smaller candles that would still work, despite the fact that the net magical results might be identical. A Charm or Gadget's magic is held in place by Prime, while an Amulet or Gizmo has its effect frozen in Time.

Pretty-Shinies (Correspondence 1, Entropy 1, Matter 1, Mind 1, Prime 1, Spirit 1)

A staple of Penny Dreadful, the Hollowers' foremost finder of magical trinkets, this Effect heightens the Awareness of the mage who invokes it, allowing her to discover magic

items hidden in secret drawers and lucky pennies that have fallen between floorboards. This Effect doesn't suggest to a mage precisely *what* something is — a ghost's anchor to the mortal world, a changeling's treasure and a werewolf's ancestral weapon are all magical on some level — but she'll get a general idea of the item's power and importance.

Correspondence sensitizes the mage to her general area, Matter allows her to look into locked chests and under floorboards, Mind takes a reading of psychic impressions, Prime checks for actual magic, Entropy indicates whether an item has some special destiny, and Spirit notes whether it is significant to some other spirit. When this magic is invoked, the mage's player rolls her character's Arete, then adds her successes to her dice pool for all Awareness rolls for "finding pretties."

For Penny (and most clever mages), this Effect is coincidental. A magical object appears particularly glittery, shiny and attractive, or it at least possesses some quaint charm, and any magpie will be drawn to it. The same holds true of objects hidden in locked drawers, in secret compartments or under loose floorboards. The mage is drawn by curiosity and the thought that there might be *something* interesting in there, which, as it turns out, there is.

If the mage raises the Correspondence Effect to the second level, she may use it to seek out some particular object (like a magic knife, a Talisman that produces flame or something similar). In such a case, the Effect becomes a twopenny charm known as **The Treasure Hunt**. The more that is known about the treasure being hunted, the easier it will be to find. Most often, however, the mage using this Effect will find some treasure that will suit her purposes, even if it was not exactly what she was hunting for.

TRINKETS AND TREASURES

Many Wonders (and a few otherwise mundane items) may also possess a destiny, a dark fate, and sometimes other Backgrounds, Merits and Flaws. Such can range from swords that are destined to slay some great evil to necklaces whose owners have all met an untimely demise. However, there's a difference between a mage who bears a great destiny and a mage who merely bears a sword with a great destiny. Such a sword wouldn't necessarily have any magical powers (although the mage could also make it a Talisman if he cared to), but it could most likely be used a focus for a number of Effects. And if the mage himself had a great destiny, the effect could be truly impressive. To add a Background (other than the basic Wonder) to an item, just increase the item's value by half the Background cost.

Some items may also possess an *Arcane* or *Dream* rating, and some may even have *Influence* — often through quite mundane means. For example, a personal letter from the Pope will help you get into any Catholic Church you please, and

there are similar documents and badges that can be flashed for a quick Influence effect. The most prized Backgrounds to be tied to physical objects are Nodes and Sanctums, but as with all magical objects, troubles may follow as well. One may have a Node and Sanctum inside his minivan, which may be useful for some purposes, but when a Node is in a house, it can't be stolen. (Storytellers should also note that while it is possible to play Dr. Emelius Brown and put your entire Sanctum into a fold-up pop-out suitcase, such Backgrounds generally take space, and they are quite susceptible to such things as weapons fire.) Even such Backgrounds as *Resources* may be tied to an object (such as, a Syndicate Primum Card with no limits, or an ever-full Hermetic purse). However, since the Background goes away when the objects are lost, the low price is still appropriate.

Talismans, or even mundane objects, can also be tied to some character Merit. Appropriate ones are such things as *Danger Sense*, *Lucky*, *Guardian Angel*, *True Faith* and *Spirit Magnet*. For example, owning a wand created by Porthos of Doissetep is going to be a lot more prestigious in mage circles than having an equally powerful magic wand forged by some nameless disparate. Likewise, having a Merit oneself is generally more useful than having an object that confers that Merit. One mage might have fae blood and thus gain a faerie affinity, while another may simply possess a signet ring entrusted to his ancestors, which marks the bearer as a faerie friend. Similarly, being lucky is better than having a lucky rabbit's foot that you can lose or have stolen. However, Merits that are inherent in you cannot be traded, while objects can.

Items can also be tied to character Flaws like *Cursed*, *Dark Fate*, *Geasa*, or *Strangeness*. Storytellers should have fun with such negative modifiers, since cursed and blessed gifts and heirlooms have a long tradition in literature, and they may be the source of entire stories. Storytellers should also remember that while legacies may come with warnings ("Do not touch the ring or your soul is doomed!"), they seldom come with instruction manuals. Discovering the nature of Wonder can be an adventure in and of itself.

LIMITS ON WONDERS

Of course, Wonders are always limited to the powers that a Storyteller wants in the game. Many Wonders labor under peculiar limitations, like only working for a particular person, drawing down all sorts of nasty Resonance or functioning only when fueled by gruesome or limited powers.

When building a Wonder, the item can't get a cost break of more than one-third of its base value. That is, a simple Artifact with a permanent level 3 enchantment (a six-point power) can't get a cost break for more than two points of Flaws, even if it has bigger problems. Only the Storyteller ultimately knows exactly what Flaws or problems a Wonder may have....

SLEEPERS AND THE TOOLS OF WONDER

While most Sleepers cannot recharge Talismans, they can make use of them, as long as they both believe in the paradigm of the mage who created the item and they Resonate strongly with the maker's personality. Depending on the Talisman, Paradox might also apply to the Sleeper who uses it — one of the most classic Paradoxes being loss of the Talisman. Talismans will not work for those who do not accept their paradigm. However, mages are strong-willed enough that they may override the Nature and Demeanor of any Talisman except in the case of an extraordinarily powerful magic object and an unusually weak-willed mage.

Charms and Gadgets will work for anyone who accepts the paradigm under which they were made, or is in an area where that paradigm holds sway (even if that person doesn't know that the object is in fact magical). For example, if Kate, who lives in the Irish countryside and believes in witchcraft, faeries and all the rest, were to put on some flying salve, thinking it was just hand creme, she'd find herself airborne whether she wanted to or not. Her cousin from Dublin wouldn't have any such troubles, unless he came out to the country and was far away from citified things. Paradox

might also apply were Kate to use the Charm in a vulgar fashion — like going to New York and flying over the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade — but since such a thing might be explained as some kind of high-tech advertising stunt, this penalty applies at Storyteller discretion. First-time uses and accidents should be treated as static magic, but flying through the air is Paradoxical enough for most Sleepers.

Amulets and Gizmos work regardless of paradigm, so long as their buttons or other triggers are pushed. Sleepers can operate them without fear of Paradox or other side effects (the price already having been paid by the mage who made them), but many consequently do not work unless the paradigms align perfectly. The laws by which Amulets work are also complicated, and Gizmos generally do not come with written instruction guides.

However, the heirs of enlightened mages and the lab assistants of the Technocracy who managed to walk out with all the Gadgets and Gizmos they could stuff in their pockets, can be interesting characters and deadly foes. Such is especially the case if they have a Talisman, Technocratic Device some Relic that they are perfectly in tune with and know how to operate. Just because someone is a mere Sleeper doesn't mean she's clueless, and knowing how to build the Death Ray 5000 and figuring out how to fire it are two different things altogether.

THE CHARITIED TALISMANIC FETISH-AMULET ARTIFACT PERIAPT THAT'S ALSO YOUR FAMILIAR, YOUR ALLY AND YOUR UNIQUE FOCUS

Yes, you can have an all-in-one item. The various enchantments and perks are simply Backgrounds, and they can be combined, as long as you pay for each of them separately. It's actually quite common.

For example, familiars and many allies are simply spirits. Talismans, Artifacts and Periaps are physical objects with magical properties. Fetishes are physical objects with spirits bound into them. If you bound a spirit into your Talisman, then made friends with it such that it was your ally, you'd have a Talisman-fetish who'd do favors for you. Or you might have it as your familiar or mentor.

For example, Wu Chi has the sword of his clan, which is an ancient Talisman. It's also his unique focus. He meditates and contacts the spirit of one of his revered ancestors, asking if the great Lo Fang would instruct him in the ways of honor and decorum, guiding his steps. Lo Fang then decides he wishes to be one with the sword he once bore, and after Wu Chi does the appropriate rituals, their spirits are one (i.e., the Talisman has had the familiar spirit bound into it). This bond both increases the power of Lo Fang and does wonders for Wu Chi as well.

Later Wu Chi uses some Prime 3 and Entropy 1/ Time 4 magic to place Charms and Amulet-style enchantments onto the sword. It's now everything — fetish, familiar, Amulet, Charm, Talisman — and as long as Wu Chi's player has paid the points, it isn't that unbalanced. Plus, it's a good alternative to Hildegard the Hermetic who has rings on each finger, an amulet around her neck, a tiara and a walking stick with an owl perched at the tip, which is what happens when you keep all your toys separate. Of course, when Dr. Magnetron uses his giant electromagnet, Wu Chi suddenly loses his sword and all his Backgrounds, whereas Hildegard only loses the lodestone out of her pinky ring. There are advantages and disadvantages to putting all your Backgrounds in one package deal.

EXAMPLE OF WONDER CREATION

As an example of creation of a Wonder, consider Jodi Blake and her “Seven-League Lappish Bitch Boots”:

Kevin and Kraig, conspiring as Storytellers often do, posit some ways to cause even more grief for their players.

Jodilyn Blake, Nephantic temptress supreme, wants to get a pair of thigh-high black patent leather bitch boots with seven-inch stiletto heels to use for her **Seven-League Stride** rote. She thinks they’ll look so good on her that she decides to make them into a permanent magical Wonder to better serve herself and the Dark Masters. In keeping with her penchant for dark Scandinavian-style witchcraft and sorcery, she chooses to base them on the ritual for “Lappish breeches” she found in a book of folktales. However, she’ll have her particular Wonder patent-processed with stiletto heels put in so they’ll be Lappish bitch boots instead.

Kraig finds the idea cool and creepy, but he checks the book of folklore that Kevin dug up. He notes that classic Lappish breeches are sort of an “everfull purse” spell, mixed with a curse. (If you die wearing them, the book says, your soul goes to Hell, and you can’t take the damned things off unless you get another sucker to step into them.) However, since getting the ritual to work in the first place requires the caster to steal a poor widow’s last silver coin to act as his “bottom dollar,” then convince someone to let the mage skin him, Kraig thinks that the conditions are more than trouble enough for Jodi. Besides, Jodi’s trials to acquire the necessary ingredients for the spell give the players enough hints for their characters to track the rote down. Kraig declares that it’s cool, and after a good bit of evil story-building, Jodi has the bitch boots made from the dead guy’s skin, plus the misappropriated sixpence.

Now comes the enchantment part. To make a permanent magical Artifact requires Prime 4 without Tass of the appropriate Resonance, but only Prime 3 with the right sort of Tass. However, enchanting a living being — or making a magic Wonder that will graft itself to your ass — requires Prime 5 (or with Prime 4 if you have the right sort of Tass). Jodi begins her casting, charging up the bitch boots with the power of the Dark Masters and Prime 4. After a bit of extended ritual, she gets the eight successes that Kraig decides that she needs to make the Effect permanent. That done, she’s ready to start concocting other enchantments.

First off, Jodi starts with the “Lappish breeches” ritual that Kevin found in the book of Scandinavian folklore. She tucks the widow’s sixpence (one of her pawns of Tass) in the little purse she’s attached to the side of one boot, and Jodi casts a Matter 3/Prime 2 Effect to create money. With 10 successes on an extended ritual, she builds in the ever-full purse Effect. The dead-man’s-skin boots provide the rest of the Tass she needs to craft the classic Artifact. Next, she casts the **Seven-League Stride** rote with Correspondence 3, using six pawns of Tass in the form of a strand of thread

from each of the six continents, to embroider magical sigils into the edges of the boots. After getting six successes, she’s made the Lappish breeches do double duty.

Next, Jodi throws a Prime 2 **Enchant Weapon** Effect on the boots’ heels, getting the successes she needs to make it permanent on the first try, and anoints them with four pawns of Tass in the form of unholy oil blasphemed by a defrocked priest. Kraig then considers making the heels able to do nasty damage in combat, so he builds in an extra die of damage, which would count as a four-point Merit. There’s no particular Sphere to roll for this — stiletto heels are stiletto heels — so Kraig doesn’t bother. He just decides that if Jodi rubs the heels with four more pawns of unholy oil, then the Dark Masters will be pleased to bless them with Their evil might.

Kraig finally adds a Life 2 Effect to make the boots permanently shiny and self-repairing, since they’ll be grafted to Jodi’s skin, and a Life 3 Effect to have the boots make her look even more sexy and alluring, increasing her Appearance rating. Since the boots are made from the skin of a recently deceased man, and they do graft themselves to the wearer, this suggestion sounds about right and horribly wrong! Jodi casts rituals for another several hours and throws around 10 pints of virgin’s blood Tass to work her evil Life magic, finally succeeding in her spells.

Kraig and Kevin then tally up the cost. The “Lappish breeches” spell, although done as a Matter 3/Prime 2 Effect, effectively just gives Jodi a few dots of the Resources Background. Kraig decides that three dots of said Background is more than enough pocket change, especially since it wasn’t her initial object with the ritual. The **Seven-League Stride** Effect is calculated as a level 3 Effect cost, for six points. The heels’ extra damage costs another four, the permanent **Enchant Weapon** spell costs another four, and the automatic self-repair spell is worth four again because it’s permanent. The **Better Body** Effect that enhances the wearer’s Appearance rating costs just as much as the usual spell Effect, so it costs six points. The total value of the Artifact stands around 27 points.

Since this cost comes after character creation, it accrues in experience. Buying a Background like this with experience costs two experience per Background level, or a whopping 54 experience points! This is 54 points that Jodi just doesn’t have lying around. However, as Kevin points out, Flaws can reduce the cost of the Artifact, and there are a few classic ones that would be appropriate. Kraig doesn’t want an item that powerful running around without some controls to give his players a shot at surviving, so he looks into the potential drawbacks.

Kraig and Kevin both examine the folktale and decide that the “die with your boots on, go to Hell” clause could be done as a Geas linked to the *Dark Fate* Flaw. *Dark Fate* is a five-point Flaw, but the “only if you die with your boots on” condition drops it down by two points to a three-point Flaw. That’s helpful, but not great. However, the folktale also says

that if you ever spend your last coin out of the pocket, the enchantment is broken. At most the boots can have one third of their price taken off in Flaws, which means nine points. The “spend your bottom dollar and lose everything” Geasa sounds like a good idea so he looks for up to nine points of Merits that can be linked to that Flaw and possibly lost. Kraig decides that the linked curse for the Geas could be that the heels will fall off if the last penny is removed — losing her both the **Enchant Weapon** Effect and the damage modifier, for a total of eight points, which less the value of the Flaw equals five points. Kevin is amused, and he tells Kraig to go for it. The boots now have 27 points of Merits and eight points of enchantments/ Flaws, for an end cost of 19 Freebie points, or 38 experience points. Kraig decides to defray the cost by determining that the Dark Masters say to place the boots on the altar on lay-away and go commit more acts of evil until Jodi has the credit to pay for them, or else to suffer Their wrath (and Pattern bleeding). Never mind that Jodi picks up an extreme quantity of Resonance from the whole feat, and given time, the player group may well stumble across her little project and spoil the spell while it’s in the works!

FAMILIARS



Familiars are spirits linked to a mage's Avatar, granting the mage greater access to Arete as well as other knowledge and power. A familiar need not have a physical form, but one is often useful. Many familiar spirits, however, possess the spirit Charm Materialize, which allows them to take corporeal form for a period of time. Others possess vacant shells that a mage has created by use of the Sphere of Life (or that the spirit has acquired by other means), or they have gifts that allow them to take possession of and animate a nonliving object.

CARE AND FEEDING OF YOUR FAMILIAR

Familiars are individuals, and they all have different needs. Some require special food, such as Mister Mistofeles' diet of blood and milk and human hearts stewed in wine. Others merely enjoy this eccentric cuisine, but they are equally happy with fresh cream and sushi. Some make elaborate pacts, like demons or lawyers, while others simply have an informal arrangement, sticking around as they see fit, the same as any ally.

Some familiars require Tass to live, while others merely enjoy it, the same as mages. Most familiars *want* to be fed Tass, assuming that it's something with an appropriate Resonance. For example, a familiar housed in the body of a greyhound would probably love to have select cuts of meat from pegasi and manticores put in his dog dish. However, he would turn up his nose at the oil and batteries from a



THREE CATS

Not all familiars are created equal, even ones worth the same amount of points and who appear nearly identical on the surface. Take the three familiars listed here, all of whom appear as cats: Martika, Mr. Mistoffelees, and Josephine.

Martika is a spirit who usually appears as a Russian blue cat with gold eyes. Ivan Minsky's grandmother summoned her to be a guardian and instructor for Ivan. Martika is a true spirit, and she has no real physical form. She appears and disappears as she pleases. Then again, she normally appears as a cat, so no one notices. When it's not convenient for Ivan to go out with a cat on his shoulder — for example, to a nightclub — Martika takes the form of a beautiful Russian woman with prematurely gray hair and pale hazel eyes, but she can still sprout claws when she wants to. She's terribly independent, and she causes Ivan about as much trouble as she's worth. She knows much about magic and spirits, but she knows very little about the real world. Martika communicates telepathically or by normal human speech, depending on her mood.

Mr. Mistoffelees wears the form of a small black cat whom the Nephantic mage Jodi Blake ritually sacrificed, then reanimated, over 400 years ago. The spirit inside the cat, however, is much older, and he has served witches since before the time of Babylon. Mr. Mistoffelees has lived for so long as a cat, however, that he identifies himself very strongly with the animal. He does not think of the various witches he serves, or has served, as "masters" or "mistresses," except in a "mistress equals amusing person who feeds me cream" sort of way. Even though he has served it in the past, he holds no particular allegiance to the Nephantic cause. He is not a corrupted — or pure — spirit so much as one who is completely alien, and he has little or no comprehension of human morality, values or the difference between good and evil. Mr. Mistoffelees will happily find a new master or mistress if he is treated badly or taken for granted, especially if his pact of servitude is broken. Currently, he is the familiar of the Hollow One named Penelope Drizkowski (a.k.a. Penny Dreadful), who gave him his current name after the T.S. Elliot poem. Mr. Mistoffelees' spirit Charms keep his cat's body young and well repaired, even though it is over four centuries old. He also has a wealth of information concerning the practice of Western European witchcraft down through the ages. Mr. Mistoffelees can talk in a high, catlike voice if he wants to, and his eyes glow green whenever he's curious or angry.

Josephine appears as a well loved and well-worn children's toy, a floppy rag-doll cat made from calico fabric. When called by name, however, she becomes a living calico cat, assuming she has access to Quintessence. She has been a familiar of child mages for over 100 years, and she is responsible for the Awakening of at least five. Josephine is a very kind and comforting familiar, and the only demand that she makes consistently is that when her owners are "grown up" and they no longer need her, they should give her to some child who needs her more. Josephine communicates telepathically with her children in either of her forms.

HIT Mark. The oil and batteries would be just the thing to give a Son of Ether's robotic familiar, though, while the magical dog food wouldn't be.

ADOPT-A-FAMILIAR

Aside from the lengthy spirit-questing and crafting of physical shells that advanced mages go through to gain their ideal familiar, most mages get them second-hand.

Familiars are often more survivable than mages, being less flamboyant, smaller and generally less principled than mages themselves. However, without a master or mistress, they starve for Quintessence. At worst, they have to go and scavenge it for themselves. A magic cat who has been a pampered pet for the past century might survive for a while on the streets, licking up spilled vampire blood and bits of slaughtered werewolves, but why do that when you can be served cream in a dish by a fledgling mage? Sensible familiars

go in search of a new master, possibly even the mage who killed their old one.

Storytellers may use this fact as a unique opportunity for familiar characters. A 200-year-old parrot makes for an intriguing mentor, and an excellent source of information. Also, even if a character has a low number of Background points invested in his familiar, the dearth may not reflect the weakness of the familiar, but the amount of information and power to which an older familiar allows access. Or perhaps the amount of trouble that the familiar causes balances out her usefulness. Mr. Mistoffelees won't tell Penny the secret rites of the Temple of Lilitu until he's good and ready (and until her player pays the points). While Martika may teach Ivan a great deal of magic, she also sneaks out to nightclubs and brings punk rockers back to his bedroom in the middle of the night.

SUMMONING AND BINDING A FAMILIAR

Creating the cords that bind a familiar is an exercise that nearly any novice mage can undertake. All that's required is sufficient Spirit magic to call and entice the would-be familiar spirit. Many grimoires and tomes contain special rituals that let the mage summon a familiar even without appropriate Spirit knowledge (essentially, functioning as Artifacts that include a spirit-summoning Effect).

Like fetish creation, summoning a familiar involves a lot of haggling on the part of the mage. However, unlike a fetish, the mage intends to give the familiar a form through which it can express its intelligence and act independently.

Doing so has advantages and disadvantages. The familiar can do a lot of things independently, like helping out its master when he's unconscious or otherwise unable to call for aid, and offering up bits of choice advice. It can also take the initiative and do things that the mage didn't want it to do.

Each Tradition has its own take on binding a familiar. A Virtual Adept might have a quirky but helpful AI, while a Hermetic mage or Verbena is likely to have the traditional cat, bat or toad. The physical shell isn't what's important, though. The spirit is what counts.

The mage must use the spirit-binding ritual to actually bind the summoned spirit to his Avatar. Hermetic theory discusses a series of cords, Verbena talk about shared life-force, and other Traditions have similar descriptions. The point is that the familiar spirit is bound to the mage inextricably unless the terms of the binding are somehow violated or broken.

In exchange for Quintessence, care and the occasional bit of aid, the familiar gifts the mage with its knowledge and powers. A familiar can share most (often all) of its special abilities with its host; due to the link between spirit and Avatar, this transfer is automatic and inviolable. Therefore, if the familiar holds some amount of magical energy, the mage can take and use that Quintessence without even having to use the normal Prime Effect necessary to draw from Tass as long as the familiar is willing! Similarly, the familiar might gift the mage with some of its Merits or Flaws. A mage with a cat familiar could have night vision, but he might also be moody and sleepy most of the time.

Once the familiar is bound successfully, the bond is inviolate. Only a Master of Spirit could possibly affect the bond. However, the mage could breach its terms, or the familiar could be killed in a fashion that destroys the spirit. Other than that, a familiar stays with the mage pretty much forever.

BUILDING THE FAMILIAR

In game terms, a familiar is similar to a fetish, but it has the ability to use all of its capabilities at its choosing. It's free-willed and, if the mage gifts it with extra powers (as a Relic, for instance), it can use those, too. Depending upon its form, the familiar may be mobile, or it may have some capacity for supernatural movement.

As with a fetish, the familiar's value depends upon the spirit's total power (see *Mage: The Ascension*, Chapters Three and Nine). Note, however, that a familiar can have more powers or knowledge than it releases to the mage.

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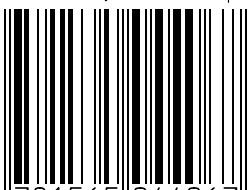
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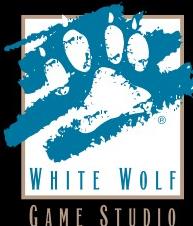
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